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公爵令嬢の 嗜好^{たしな}み

公爵夫人の嗜好

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ガガガBOOKS

Common Sense of a Warrior

– Buke no Tashinami –

- Part 1 -

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[Kiriko Translations]

- STORY -

I was born to a Marquess military family; my father is a hero of the country. Motivated by my mother's death one night in a burglary, I too resolved to study the blade. My aim was to join the army just like my father, and to avoid repeating my mother's tragedy. Unexpectedly, despite my gender, my swordsmanship grew strong... However, my ambition ended when I learned that women could not enroll into the army. Furthermore, although I hadn't received even a single lesson in proper etiquette, I suddenly had my engagement set with a Ducal House that had churned out prime ministers for generations...

Related Series:

"Common Sense of a Duke's Daughter"
(Original Series/Sequel)

Chapter 1

An Irrational Reality

The bell chimes.
A solemn and gloomy..... funeral bell.

“.....mother.....”

I called out to my mother, who was sleeping in the casket.
However, she would never be able to respond to my voice.
Even if I knew that, when I saw my mother who appeared as if she were sleeping there,
it made me hope that her eyelids would open if I continued to call out to her.
But as expected, my mother’s eyes did not open.
Even if I cried and clung to her, unless I were able to reverse time..... I will be unable
to see mother’s smile, or hear her voice again.

Tears overflowed from the reality that had been thrust before me.
My body moved on its own, approaching mother’s side in attempt to cling to her.
When I touched mother’s cold body, I was made to understand that this was no dream.

.....my name is Mellice.
Mellice Reese Anderson.
Marquis Anderson’s only daughter.

Father is a hero that was made the head of the Anderson Marquis House, which was
granted a territory by this country, Tasmeria Kingdom.
Even father, who always laughs heartily, is simply depressed right now.
Big brother is also sobbing loudly at the side.

“A boy from the proud warrior house of Anderson doesn’t cry over something like
this.”

The one who always encourages him loudly like that, mother, is no longer here.

.....since she’s in a dream that she’ll never wake from again, it’s only natural.

From the surroundings, I can hear the sounds of sobbing.

She was a kind and beautiful mother.

She was someone who'd lend an ear to anybody, a person who freely spread her kindness around.

Despite that, why.....

Why did mother have to go through something like this.....!

While I was sad on one hand, a violent anger filled my chest.

This world is irrational.

I understood that. No..... I was made to understand.

Desperately enduring, I bit my lips to hold down my impulse to cry out. Within my mouth, the taste of iron began to spread out.

“.....Melly. Right now, could you just think about your mother?”

My father's words snapped me back to reality.

.....I wonder if father read my inner thoughts?

Though such a question floated through my mind, I currently did not care about such a trifling matter, as I once again returned my attention to my mother alone.

“.....mother.....”

I quietly murmured.

Naturally, there was no answer to my call.

Even now, tears were endlessly overflowing.

.....softly, I closed my eyes and prayed.

For mother's happiness in the next world.

Suddenly, as I opened my eyes, father's figure appeared in front of me.

At the same time, I realized.

Father, who had never once shown us his tears, had a single droplet rolling down his cheek.

Chapter 2

A Hero's Tracks 1

The Tasmeria Kingdom that I live in was at war with the neighbouring country of Towair just ten-odd years ago.

Towair is northwest of Tasmeria, and possesses land from which it is hard to produce crops. On the other hand, because they also do not have any valuable minerals, it is a poor country.

That, is why.

Aiming for our country's fertile lands, the country of Towair came invading.

Without a single proclamation of war, they suddenly attacked.

Naturally, Tasmeria Kingdom wasn't able to properly deal with it, and numerous territories were overrun.

As a result of the stationed troops from the Kingdom's Army and the feudal lord's private army being crushed, Earl Sezun's territory was completely occupied by the enemy country.

Around the time when they began to aim for the neighbouring territory owned by Earl Monroe on two fronts – the north and the west, and fell into a disadvantageous situation...

My father's troop was ordered to recover Sezun's former territory.

Father, as the commanding officer of the Kingdom's First Army Corps, led his army to the frontlines.

If you wish to know why my father, who was the heir of a Marquis house, was sent to the site of such a bloody battle, the answer would be the organization my father was a part of.

Normally, the role of protecting the capital and the royalty is left to the Knight Order, of which the sons of nobles are attached to.

However, usually, the ones aiming to join it are the second or third sons hoping for

some military accomplishments. Hardly any of the eldest sons would choose to join it.

Despite that, saying that aristocratic society was too stiff, my father joined the Kingdom's Army instead of the Knight Order.

Not only that, but it was in spite of being the heir to his family.

The Kingdom's Army welcomes all, and is an organization composed mostly of commoners.

They function mainly in the defense of the kingdom's borders, and to maintain public order within the country.

The Kingdom's Army and Knight Order have a relationship like oil and water, with those of the Knight Order looking down on the Kingdom's Army thinking, "They're just a bunch of muscleheads without any brains", while those of the Kingdom's Army look down on the Knight Order thinking, "A bunch of young masters that don't know true combat".

.....and within that, it truly does make one think that it's amazing that father, who is not only a noble, but the heir to a Marquis House at that, attempted to enter the military through the Kingdom's army.

In reality, I've heard that it was quite difficult when he first entered the army.

It seems that there was opposition within the Kingdom's Army to having a noble enroll in it, and the Marquis House was also strongly against it.

In fact, it was to the point where there was an uproar about the Marquis House disinheriting father.

Nonetheless, through the strength of his nature, it seems that father's position within the army steadily began to build up.

Regardless of one's standing, the Kingdom's Army welcomes all.

Without caring for one's rank, it could be said that it is a military organization which holds a doctrine based on one's true strength.

Hence, in the face of father's capabilities, the opposition to his enrollment did not last long.

Chapter 3

A Hero's Tracks 2

The problem was on the Marquis House's side.

In the end, they didn't disown him, but took away his right to inherit the house and passed it on to the second son.

Though father wasn't particularly mindful of his position, and thus accepted the situation without any objections.

Grandfather's judgement was correct.

The reason being that as long as you're attached to the Kingdom's Army, you never know when you might lose your life.

And even if he was from a warrior house, that father entered the Army instead of the Knight's Order despite being the house's successor, lead to his reputation amongst other nobles being poor.

.....it's just that *that* only applied if father didn't have as much power as he did.

Father managed to recover the former Sezun territory with just a single unit, and simply left its protection to the other units that arrived afterwards before heading eastward.

He met up with the pressured Earl Monroe's soldiers as well as the forces the Kingdom's Army had dispatched there, and succeeded in accomplishing great exploits by repelling the enemy.

It is unknown just how many enemy commanders' heads he harvested.
His amassed military exploits were so great that he could be praised as a hero.

Naturally within the Kingdom's Army, father became an object of adoration through his military exploits that he obtained despite being a noble, as well as his natural charisma as a commander. Even within the Knight's Order, he was adored..... or so the story goes.

That being the case, there was no way that such a father could be left alone by one of the warrior families like the Anderson Marquis House.

Father was once again reinstated as the next feudal lord.

You'd think that there'd be some sort of dispute over that, but the title of 'hero' was heavy in the sense that it forced them to accept it.

On the other hand, what became a major incident was his marriage with mother.

Mother was the daughter of a baron.

I wasn't told the details of how they met, but their great passion lead to the promise that they would marry.

It would've been fine if he had remained disinherited, but he had become a rare hero and was the next head of a Marquis house.

Their family statuses didn't match up well.

The weight of the title of hero conversely worked against them.

Throughout the country, an uncountable number of noble families wished to make a connection with father by marriage.

Even within the Anderson House there were apparently a considerable number of voices of dissent.

In the end, it seems that father simply said, "If I can't marry Merida, I'll quit the army", putting an end to the uproar.

At that point in time, it was clear just how deeply father had fallen for mother. They were heart-warming, or perhaps I should say, that they constantly created heart-tickling scenes between them.

Finally, engulfed with such great passion, the two of them became bound together..... but even when my elder brother, and even I, was born as a matter of course, the two of them continued to be deeply in love.

Sometimes, it was to the point where brother and I wished to avert our eyes.

That boorish father of mine only acted cute in front of my mother..... seeing him act so differently from when he was in the army, even father's trusted retainer Baron

Messi seemed completely bewildered.

Mother was a truly lovely woman.

Both calm and gentle.

Even though she surely should have endured many hardships in marrying into a Marquis house, she always made an incredibly tender smile.

Perhaps it should only be expected of one who stood in the position of father's wife – she had quite a bit of guts.

Though it may have been the blood of his victims, upon confirming that the blood-covered father was unscathed, she simply said, "Arara, maa. We'll have to prepare a hot bath immediately" and accepted it while smiling.

Her reaction surprised both my brother and I.

No no, it would've been better if father had washed off the blood splatter back at the army facilities..... is what my brother and I retorted.

Because that day was their wedding anniversary, father wanted to spend it with mother and took a day off.

But because everyone from the Kingdom's army clung to him in tears, he reluctantly went out..... and as soon as the mission finished, it seems he left the report that he was supposed to do upon returning to his subordinates and directly headed home, but..... where in the universe would you find a husband coming back to celebrate his wedding anniversary covered in blood.

Well, that was something completely natural for our home.

Father was there, mother was there, and big brother was there.

Although there wasn't any feeling of formality even though we were a Marquis house.

Even so, it was an extremely happy home.

.....until that day.

Chapter 4

Training

I opened my eyes.

At the same time, my thoughts returned to reality.

It was about time for my turn, so I stood up, and took my sword in hand.

As expected, on the practice field, a man on one side collapsed, and the referee shouted out the name of the victor.

.....though since there wasn't any audience, there weren't any cheers, but the winner stood triumphantly.

As if to change the atmosphere of the place, the man acting as the referee called out my name.

And then, the name of my opponent as well.

I did not hurry, but to avoid making my opponent wait, I went up to the practice field. Standing before my eyes was a large man.

On top of having muscles forged out of training that gave off an overwhelming presence, he was a big man that was one or two times my size.

I drew out my practice blade, a sword with a dulled edge.

Though his opponent was a young girl like myself, my opponent showed no signs of making light of me and similarly drew his sword.

.....as an opponent, he wasn't lacking at all.

And as the two of us had gotten into stance, the referee's voice commencing the match reverberated.

Clang clang clang. The sound of the practice blades' blunt edges clashing resounded. The opponent's movements were powerful, but conversely speaking, it could be said to be a swordsmanship that relied solely on power.

I looked carefully at the opponent's movements, and felt his breathing.

Then I predicted what would happen in the next instant, and dealt with it.

As I recalled the words that I was always telling myself in a corner of my mind, I avoided the opponent's sword and counterattacked.

The opponent received my sword with his own.

Even if I were to continue clashing swords with him, I would lose in power, so I immediately retreated.

And then, I once again aimed at the opponent's bosom and broke into a run.

The opponent swung his sword towards me as I calmly ran.

I matched his timing and swung my sword as if I was going to receive his.

For a moment, a rather surprised expression crossed my opponent's face, but it soon disappeared as he used all his strength to swing his sword.

Without a single sign of going easy on me, it was a swift and heavy sword.

I parried the opponent's power without stopping the blow.

"Uwah.....!"

Thanks to parrying him well, the opponent's stance crumbled. Entering into his bosom, I swung my sword to beat him with it.

Then, I placed my sword on the neck of my collapsed opponent as he lay face down on the ground.

".....that's it! The winner, Mel!!"

Together with the referee's voice, I sheathed my sword.

Since mother passed away, it has already been 7 years.

Whether it has passed quickly or not, I don't know.

But every day, I have been polishing my sword like this.

Chapter 5

My Tracks 1

I can never forget the events that happened the day that my mother died.

“Elder brother, is mother still not back yet?”

“That’s all Melly has been asking for a while now. It’s as I told just now. If they’re on schedule, then she’s probably around the neighbouring territory to ours. Come on, wait quietly.”

Elder brother and I were eagerly waiting for mother’s return to the territory from the Capital.

That day was my birthday, and I absolutely wanted my parents to congratulate me, so I threw a tantrum..... as a result, for a ceremony that they had to attend, father stayed behind while mother alone came back.

“Ah, I’m sure that’s mother.....!”

Hearing the mansion suddenly become noisy, I ran towards the entrance.

However, the one there wasn’t mother.

Instead, there was a man covered in blood.

“Hurry..... call a doctor!”

“Madam! Madam, please get a hold of yourself!”

With loud footsteps, the servants bustled about.

Just what in the world has happened?

“What in the world happened!?”

“We were attacked on the border between the territories..... other than me, the guard troop was completely annihilated. Merilda-sama alone was... and.....”

At that moment, the man collapsed.

“Wait a moment..... you also have terrible injuries!..... someone! Hurry up and carry him!”

The maid next to the man shouted while wiping the man’s blood.

“I am... fine..... I’m already fine. More importantly, Merilda-sama is.....”

As he muttered that, a red liquid steadily flowed out from the man’s body, dying the floor.

“Please leave the Madam to us.”

“I... see.....”

While the man let out a long sigh, the entrance once again became noisy.

“The doctors have come!”

“Then, one should go to the Madam! The other, treat this man.....!”

“.....that will not be necessary.”

The one who interrupted the butler, Dasmond’s instructions, was the maid who was staying by the collapsed man’s side.

“He is no longer..... in order not to let his death go to waste, the both of you, hurry up and go to the Madam.....”

On her face as she coldly spoke, was the trail of a single tear.

In an instant, the noisy place returned to silence.

However, everyone soon began to noisily get going.

I also suddenly returned to my senses and started moving sluggishly again.

Is mother alright.....?

“Madam, Madam! Please get a hold of yourself!”

The servants earnestly shouted.
Amongst them, were the doctors examining mother who was lying in the bed.

“Unfortunately.....”

However, the grim-faced doctors said those heartless words.

Stop.....!
Don't say it like that!
Hurry, heal mother.....!

My screams that I could not voice, fruitlessly echoed in my chest.
However, the screams of my heart did not reach them.
The doctors took one step, and then another, as if to draw back and leave.

“No way..... Madam!? Madam.....!”

The world froze.
I cannot comprehend it.
No..... it was not that I couldn't, but I didn't want to.

Mother has died?
A lie.....! Lies, lies lies.....!

.....I do not really remember what happened after that.
However, even now I think to myself.
Why did mother have to die.....!

Having been born into a military family, I had indirectly come to understand life-and-death from a young age.
Though father is strong, he is but a single human being.
Every time he went on a mission, he would tell us that you never know what might happen, indirectly conveying that thought to us.
However, he was by no means being pessimistic. He even said that he was proud to put his life on the line for the country.

In order to protect the country, and the people.
That is the responsibility of a noble, and their duty, he said.

But, why..... why did mother pass away?
Did she have to die?

Even though father has continued to accomplish his duties as a noble, for the people to steal mother's life.....!

It has nothing to do with whether or not they were bandits.
Because they are also people of this country.

Father has..... just for what purpose has he been protecting this country for, I wonder?
Why must nobles protect the citizens!

This world is irrational.
That, I understood.
No..... I was made to understand.

I was a tomboy, and through my brother's influence, without learning the proper manners of a noble girl, I would run around the gigantic Anderson home covered in dirt, and climb trees while wearing a dress.

However, my mother who would greet my father with a smile as he came home covered in blood..... though she was troubled by my actions, she would always usher me inside with a warm smile.

.....I should have spent more time with mother.
If I did embroidery, or more girly things, I'm sure that wish would've been fulfilled.

But after mother died, rather than trying to remember her by doing those things, I chose a completely opposite path.
Leading to my current situation.

After mother's funeral, I cried to the point that my tears dried up.
I cried, and cried..... within my gapingly empty heart, the feelings that had dwelled within it for that single instance during the ceremony sprung forth once more.
In short..... anger and hatred.

Desiring to take revenge, I lamented my lack of power.
Cursing the irrationality of reality, I felt ashamed at my helplessness.

That's why I begged my father.
Saying that I wanted him to train me.

Father didn't ask me anything about my reasons.
In exchange, he simply said, "If you want it, then I shall do so strictly".

And from the next day on, I threw myself into training.

Chapter 6

My Tracks 2

“.....now then. Melly. Before we start training, let us test how much you can currently move.”

Prior to beginning the full-blown training, father checked my bodily abilities.

“Fumu..... you’re able to move more than I thought you would.”

Father said that as the outcome of the check.

As a result of running around within the mansion, my basic physical strength was high compared to other children of the same generation.

Because I had been playing in the forests behind the mansion which were untouched, they had their own sort of natural obstacles.

And because I chased around wild animals, my kinetic vision and reflexes were also quite good.

“Even so, to undergo training..... you still have a ways to go.”

And so, the training menu that I was handed, was a hellish menu that I didn’t even want to think about afterwards.

I had to wake up in the morning before the sun rose, and run around inside.

Three laps around the mansion.

Though it was only three laps, to run around such a huge mansion was quite tough.

“.....uu.”

Upon finishing my running, I felt so bad, it made me want to puke.

After that, I drank water containing some salt and water, taking a short break, and then restarted my training.

After running came exploration of the forest on the mansion grounds on foot.

The inside of the forest has all sorts of terrains, and the small ups and downs of them are rather cute.

A small brook that didn't have any bridge built to cross it was set in between cliffs that were the height of two people put together. In order to cross it, you had to climb down and then back up again.

It seems that the reason why the forest was untouched was for the purposes of father's personal training.

".....tsuu."

While I was climbing the cliff, my palm unluckily hit a rock, popping one of my blisters. Looking at it, the palm of my hand was bright red.

For the time being, I descended to the brook and washed my hand there.

The clear water sparkled as sunlight showered upon it, with a small amount of my blood mixing into it, leaving a red line as it flowed away.

I teared off a part of my clothing that wasn't wet, and wound it around the palm of my hand.

And then, I once again climbed the cliff.

This blister was made from practice-swinging a sword.

Every afternoon, in order to reproduce the movements that father taught me, I did nothing but practice swinging a sword.

Though it didn't feel that heavy just by holding it, after repeatedly swinging the sword several hundreds and thousands of times, eventually my arm became numb with its weight.

When I did that over and over again, before I knew it, my palm had become like that.

After enduring the pain and clambering up the cliff, I resumed running.

And then once I finished travelling through the forest, it was finally time for my midday break.

Even if I didn't have any appetite, if I didn't eat, I wouldn't be able to move..... so I properly consumed the meal that was presented to me.

After a short break, all I did was swing the sword until the sun set.

Until father returned, all I did was repeat that.

When I finished eating my evening meal, I'd collapse onto my bed as if I were fainting.that was my every day.

“I shall do it strictly.”

Exactly like father said, he did not permit a single complaint.

Even if he saw me vomiting, he'd just watch on disinterestedly.

It seemed like if I spoke even a single word of complaint, he'd immediately stop the training.

However, I myself also could not allow that at all.

Even I think that I went at it with a blood-curdling vigour.

After all, if I looked at myself objectively, a young girl that hadn't even reached the age of 10, was undergoing training from morning till evening without playing one bit.

I want to be strong, I want revenge..... it was just solely for that purpose.

All day and night, I did nothing but train.

Chapter 7

My Tracks 3

I wonder, just how much time have I spent building up my physical strength and doing practice swings with my sword, day after day?

Seeing my practice swings, father suddenly said, “Watch” and stood in front of me. Even though he has only been watching up until now without giving any instructions, I wonder what’s suddenly come over him?

Before I could ask that question, father began to display his swordsmanship*.

(T/N: More specifically, it says he began to ‘trace’ out his ‘kata’ (as in the standard movements in martial arts forms, but I can’t think of a good English equivalent for this)

I suppose he wants me to watch and remember it?

Though I was left with a lot of questions, I refreshed my thoughts and focussed on the movements in front of me.

In order to burn every single one of father’s moves into my eyes, I watched while forgetting to even blink.

“Practice it.”

Leaving those words behind, father’s performance ended.

Left alone, I recalled the movements I had burned into my eyes, and moved my body numerous times.

.....however, it wouldn’t quite move the way I imagined it.

My body could not keep up with the images in my mind.

As the awkwardness and incompleteness of the moves stood out, I became fed up with my own actions.

Why can’t I do it...!? –like that, there was a sense of irritation.

Probably, because I could imagine the movements I was aiming towards, it felt even more irritating.

Needless to say, after that, tracing out those movements was also included into my

daily training menu.

“.....tch.”

Once again, a blister popped.

Looking at it, the red from the palm of my hand slightly dyed the part of the wooden sword I was holding.

I tore the hand towel that was placed aside, and wrapped it around the palm of my hand.

.....it doesn't hurt.

.....it isn't tough.

Because I know..... what truly hurts, and what is truly tough.

On the other hand, this pain and suffering caused the violent hate whirling inside of me to flare up even more.

That is why, I will not stop. I cannot stop.

And so, I resumed practice-swinging.

I did nothing but repeat that training over and over again.

Around the time the movements I had been taught sank into my body, I was made to face elder brother in a mock battle.

Though it was called a mock battle, it was just a cute exchange of blows.

However, it was perfect to further drive those movements into my body.

As expected, facing someone was different from doing it on your own.

While fighting, I felt that it was a necessary training to make both parties stronger.

Hence, while exchanging blows with elder brother, I naturally continued the training I had been doing up until then.

“Haa... haa.....!”

I wiped the sweat dripping from my forehead with my hand.

Then, following that movement, I dropped my gaze to the palm of my hand.

Nowadays, blisters did not form as easily on my palm, but in exchange, it became hard and rugged..... it has turned into a hand that simply did not appear to belong to that

of a girl.

Since it seemed to embody the results of my training up until now, I was genuinely happy.

As I made a faint complacent smile and turned my gaze ahead of me, elder brother sat down, appearing exhausted.

I also placed a hand on my knee while continually making laboured breaths.

“Melly. Next you’ll fight with me.”

Father, who had appeared unnoticed, suddenly started to say something like that.

At those words, I momentarily gaped in a befuddled manner.

However, in the next instant, I understood those words, and reflexively laughed.

Finally.

Finally, I’ve been recognized as having reached the point where I could exchange blows with father.

It gave me a sense of fulfillment I had never experienced before, and happiness.

As well as a little bit of nervousness and fear.

“Please treat me well.....!”

And so, this time a one-on-one mock battle with father commenced.

Father may have gone easy on me, but from my point of view, he beat me without mercy.

“What’s wrong, is that all you’ve got?”

Father looked down on me as I collapsed.

.....I was completely unable to reach him.

Even though I thought I had gotten a little stronger, in front of father I was far too powerless.

Honestly, it was frustrating.

As I grovelled on the ground, I looked up at father.

Between father and I, there was an evident gap.

Whether it be experience, strength, or speed, I was lacking in everything.

That being the case, then I had to bring forth *something* that would close that gap.

.....even father lost something important to the irrational reality.

That being the case, just how strong would I have to become before it will be sufficient?

Just how strong would I have to become in order to fulfill my wish?

.....I don't know.

However, at the very least, right now I still have some ways to go if I am being looked down on father like this.

I pressed my trembling hand against the ground, and stood up once more.

"It's not... enough."

And so, I fought against father again.

Chapter 8

My Tracks 4

Though I was beaten up again and again, I continued to desperately swing my sword. And then, around the time I became capable of taking one point from father for every five he took from me-

“.....Alright. From tomorrow on, participate in the Guard Corps’ training.”

“.....haa.”

At father’s sudden order, I inadvertently gave a half-hearted response.

The Anderson Marquis House’s private troops..... also known as the Guard Corps. They were the warriors that obeyed the head of the Anderson Marquis House that was highly honoured for their military arts.

To begin with, in order not to bring shame to the name of the Anderson Marquis House, each generation of sons to the House would continue to polish their martial arts.

For the sake of accompanying them, a certain level of training was sought out from the members of the Guard Corps.

Naturally, their true strength was overwhelmingly higher compared to the private troops from other territories.

Therefore, the bar for entering the Anderson Marquis House’s Guard Corps was high, and after entry, it was imperative to train day and night.

Even so..... no, perhaps because of that.

They were proud of their own martial arts, and the fact that they were a member of the Guard Corps.

For the Anderson Marquis House’s boys and their training, the main residence of the Anderson Marquis House had an extremely spacious training arena.

.....I digress, but since father said that his body would grow dull, in father's generation, he demolished the courtyard in the mansion in the Capital and made a training field.

That aside, I will be participating in that training?

.....I couldn't help but look forward to it, and unintentionally let out a smile.

Up until now, my training partners were elder brother and father.

That was fine on its own, but as expected, I wanted to try fighting against various people.

Above all else, I wanted to test my own power.

Surely there will be a lot of different people, and those experiences will become my flesh and blood..... and I will become stronger again.

Thinking about it like that, it couldn't be helped that I felt it was an enjoyable thing.

Seeing my expression, father who told me that gave a wry smile.

And then, the next day.

In high spirits, I headed towards the training grounds.

Upon arrival, my surroundings were filled with men one or two times bigger than me.

Naturally, I stood out.

".....oi, why is that kid here?"

"W-Who knows. Oi, you go talk to her."

"Eh, no way. I immediately end up making kids cry."

.....it's true that it might be bad to say that his face looks evil, but..... well, from a normal child's point of view, they'd probably get scared from his atmosphere – is what I murmured in my heart while facing the last person who spoke.

"Ojou-chan, why are you here? It's dangerous here, so you should probably leave quickly."

".....nice to meet you. My name is Mel. From today onwards, I will be participating in the training here. I thank you in advance for your guidance and encouragement."

As first impressions are important, I gave a proper greeting.

Incidentally, the name that I gave wasn't a nickname normally used for my name, was one I was using on father's orders.

As expected, he was hesitant about letting others know that the Marquis House's daughter was participating in the training.

However, at my words, an increasingly subtle atmosphere emerged from the members of the Guard Corps.

".....everyone, attention!"

With that timing, a single member of the corps raised his voice.

That voice which shocked one's eardrums numb caused me to be stunned momentarily.

However, as the corps members were used to it, they immediately reacted to the voice and fell into formation, and then straightened their backs, standing with beautiful posture.

"The Head has arrived."

After the preparations were put in order, father appeared.

When I took a glance at the faces of the corps members, their eyes were sparkling as if they were boys from the same generation as me.

"It is great to see that everyone is energetic today as well."

Saying that, father laughed heartily.

However, in the next instant that smile disappeared, and his expression became stern.

".....now then, it seems that she has already introduced herself, but from today on, Mel over there will be participating in the training. Before coming here, I already trained her to a certain extent, so there is no need to hold back. Everyone, use your strength and beat it into her body."

At his deep voice, my body gave a momentary shiver and trembled.

.....scared? No, it's different.

These are trembles from excitement.

Father's seriousness was transferred to me.

Thus, I was greatly anticipating the battles in the future training.

".....please take care of me!"

When I said that with a voice that came from the bottom of my stomach, father gave a small laugh.

"Well, start the training!"

Chapter 9

My Tracks 5

The training that started after that was lighter than the training that I usually did.

.....maybe it's because lately I've been adding things that I thought up here and there to the menu that I received from father.

When the warm-up exercises and strengthening menus finished, we began practice swings.

From top, to bottom.

Every time I swung my sword, it sliced down any excess emotions, and the feeling of my heart becoming calm felt good.

It was a sensation akin to something penetrating through the one core inside of me. While I was impressed with that, the practice swings also finished.

And then, we finished with one-on-on spars.

Names were called in pairs, and those two people confronted each other by exchanging blows with their swords.

I stared at their movements as if I were devouring them.

I see, so there's that way of moving too..... -like so, it was educational.

It may be possible to reproduce those movements myself, though it would be difficult with my physique. I watched while thinking about how I would deal with them if my opponent were to make those movements.

"Next, Mel and and Larda!"

Becoming one of the last people left, my name was finally called.

My opponent was the man who was the most bewildered at my appearance.

It was evident that when the person known as Larda learned I was to be his opponent, he once again was bewildered.

"Well then, begin!"

The voice of the man acting as the referee and instructor entered my ears.
However, Larda did not start moving.
It seemed that he was puzzled about what he should do with me as an opponent.

I waited for a long time, but he didn't show any signs of moving.
Thus, the one who started moving first was me.
Entering into his bosom, I swung my sword.

"Uoh.....!"

Larda's eyes widened in surprise, as he repelled my sword.
However, because of that, his stance crumbled.
Using that, I made him fall, and thrust my sword before his eyes.

".....t-the winner! Mel."

With a clamour, the surroundings became noisy.
It ended far too quickly..... above all else, it seemed that they were surprised that I managed to win.
However, inwardly, I just felt like clicking my tongue.

It doesn't feel like I fought at all.
Because he had let down his guard after all.

".....Larda. I did say it, didn't I? That the girl over there was trained by me. It's your bad habit. You ease up on your opponent when you see them as being weaker than you. On the battlefield..... no, at any time there is no weak or strong. All there is, is how you will take down your enemy, and the one who follows that through to the end will become the strong. Get rid of that naïve habit."

".....yes. My deepest apologies."

Larda hung his head at father's harsh words.

".....Mel. Do you still want to fight?"

"Yes."

“Then, next. Ganz, come.”

At father’s words, a different man took the place of Larda, coming in front of me.

“T-Then..... Ganz versus Mel. Begin!”

At the referee’s words, both he and I began to move.

Judging from his atmosphere, it seems that he wasn’t letting his guard down.

.....very good.

While receiving his sharp swordsmanship, I broadly grinned.

Nevertheless.

As expected, compared to father his movements were slow, and the strength transmitted through his sword was weak.

Although the person he was being compared to was father after all.

It’s just, it was fun having an opponent that had different movements and swordsmanship from father’s.

After exchanging blows several times, I entered his bosom and sent his sword flying.

And then, I thrust my sword to the nape of his neck when he was disarmed.

The vicinity around us fell silent.

Nobody at all opened their mouths, and they were incapable of making even a single sound.

“.....the winner, Mel.”

In the midst of that, the instructor nervously opened his mouth.

“With this, you understand how practiced Mel is..... is there anyone that is still opposed to her participating in training?”

When father asked that, not a single person raised their voice.

.....*so I was being tested*, I laughed.

“Very well. Well then, we shall end with that for today! It is fine to do as you like!”

Saying that, the training ended.

Although it ended..... well, what shall I do?

Honestly, today it didn't feel like my appetite was satiated.

.....though it was educational.

And since it was the first time I was fighting against someone other than father and elder brother, it seems that I was still excited.

On that note, without leaving my sword behind, I began to run so I could move my body.

Chapter 10

Father's Lamentation 1

".....Head. Just where did you find a child like that?"

At the words of the Commander of the Guard Corps, Gariya, I gave a wry smile.

"What? Does it bother you?"

"Yes. With that degree of strength."

"It's impossible. For her to have an ability even higher than that of the guys from the Guard Corps at such a young age."

Next to Gariya, the one working as the Vice Commander of the Guard Corps, Shurei, followed him in speaking.

Although Shurei was young, he had the ability to work as a Vice Commander.

Gariya and Shurei..... for both the most influential person and the one just under him of the First Guard Corps to give such praise in just a mere day..... recognizing my daughter's ability.

I unconsciously let out a small sigh.

"If it was just that then it probably would not have been amusing for those guys, but..... seeing her independent practice after training, it seems all of those feelings of theirs were completely blown away. Several people thought it seemed interesting so they observed her, but all of their faces, without any exceptions, became pale. Of course, that also included those who heard about it afterwards. It reminds me of the training camp after enlistment."

The training camp after enlistment..... also, for some reason, called Hell's baptism. The training contents were personally thought of, and put into practice, by me.

.....well, it's true that I may have made it a bit harder in order to break the pride of

those who were overpraised as being strong, but..... is it really to the degree that their faces become pale? –is what I thought in my heart while tilting my head.

“I’ll just say it beforehand for now, but..... even the training contents that I first gave to her only consisted of half of that, you know?”

More importantly, I had intended for the contents of the training plan that I passed to my daughter to be more gentle.

I became even more unable to understand their reactions.

“.....even half of *that* is too much, I think.”

At my words, the serious Gariya gave a rare retort.

Next to him, Shurei was making a wry smile.

“Even though she’s such a cute child. Isn’t she also at the peak of the time in her life where she still wants to play? Despite that, why is she training so desperately?”

And then, at the words that Shurei continued with, I recalled my daughter.

.....it’s true that even without the biased view of a parent’s eyes, my daughter is beautiful.

Though she was young, her body already held a complete sense of beauty.

Platinum blonde hair and transparent light blue eyes like aquamarine gems.

When she grows up, just how beautiful of a woman will she become..... even now, she’s the owner of an appearance that could fascinate anyone.

She was a child whose growth I had heartfelt anticipation for.

Such a girl was mixing together with men, training while covered in wounds.

Normally, that would be impossible.

For a noble’s... in addition, a daughter at such a young age, to have their environment degenerate to such a point was utterly impossible.

Even so, the biggest reason why she was undergoing my training, was because I had discovered her natural talent.

Of course, there was also my desire for her to learn some self-defence techniques, after

having lost my wife.

However, if it was just that, then I wouldn't be able to be that strict.

It probably would've been fine if I gave training that was lighter and more comfortable, and then that would've been the end of it.

The reason why I didn't do that, was because I wanted to cultivate her talent.

Until it ran out.

In the first place, the start of all this was due to what happened during the funeral of my wife Merida.

At the funeral service, an even greater sorrow surged forward within me when I saw my children, who were grieving like me.

However, there was an instant during that funeral.

A chilling sensation made my whole body break out in goosebumps.

A warning sent out by my instinct the moment I saw a strong person.

That resulted in the goosebumps.

When I was wondering where such a presence came from in the funeral..... and searched for the source upon sensing the danger, the moment I realized that it was coming from my own daughter, I honestly questioned my own sanity.

After all, I was feeling something like an aura (Haki) from my daughter who had just passed the age of 5.

The danger that he, who had seen numerous stalwart men, felt.

When he checked his daughter's state, at some point her tears had stopped, and instead she was biting her lips as if to tear them apart, while the flames of hatred blazed in her eyes.

What she was thinking was obvious with just a single glance.

And the fact that the emotions which manifested as a result of those thoughts were what caused his instinctive alarm bells to ring was also obvious.

".....Melly. Right now, could you just think about your mother?"

Thus, I said that to her.

Mellice looked blankly momentarily, but soon her attention returned to my wife, and

she once again began to sorrowfully shed tears.

The funeral service that was wrapped in grief ended far too abruptly. After that, I spend my days like a raging wave.

As if to run away from the sense of loss, I devoted myself to my work.

The wound would never heal.

I'm sure it would be like that for the rest of my life.

Her existence was just that big within me.

However, as the days passed, my heart gradually began to sort itself out..... and around the time I completely felt that I would definitely annihilate the bandits-

Mellice begged me.

Saying..... that she wanted me to train her.

Chapter 11

Father's Lamentation 2

Honestly speaking, for a moment I was at a loss.
Even though they were supposed to be words that were just as I wanted.
Since I felt that I wanted Mellice to practice self-defence arts.

But her eyes spoke, saying that *that* was not what she desired.
The flames of hatred flickered in her eyes.

That was why I was at a loss.
It was fine for me alone to advance on the bloody path of revenge.

However at the same time, my desire to cultivate this talent swelled up.
And then, before I realized it, I had agreed.

In the beginning, he thought that she would give up easily.
Rather, he even wanted her to do that.
However, she completed the training without letting out a single word of complaint.
And then, without her eyes growing even the least bit dimmer, she simply continued to advance on that path.

Just how many years had passed since she first asked me to train her, up until today, when she participated in this training?..... it's been 7 years, huh.
During that time, that girl who, as Shurei said, was at the prime of her life for when one would want to play around, simply continued to train without losing interest in it or letting the flames of hatred go out.

.....I had ridiculed myself countless times for the contradictory actions.

I knew that I should stop her, and that it would be best to stop the training itself to do that.

Even though I wanted her to voice a complaint, because then I'd have a good excuse to stop the training..... is what I thought countless times.

On one hand, I found my daughter's eyes that continued to look forward without dimming one bit to be loveable.

As well as the figure of her continuing to practice even more than what was assigned to her.

I couldn't help but anticipate just how strong she would become in the future.

Thus, unnoticed, I stopped trying to stop myself.

And then I taught her sword techniques.

At first, it didn't resemble swordsmanship at all.

However, it gradually became sharper and faster.

It was amusing how well it went.

She caught up to her older brother who had started training over three years before her, and tried sparring with him.

Eventually, her older brother wasn't her opponent anymore, and she started to spar with me.

Her height, together with length of her limbs, as well as her speed and power, were completely different.

But, she tried to bite into me.

If her power wasn't enough..... that girl built herself up, compensating for it using technique and her manner of movement.

Eventually, confronting her made me to shiver, causing goosebumps to rise.

It was the same ability I felt during the funeral.

I really wasn't mistaken, I laughed.

In my eyes, she was unmistakably a genius.

It wasn't something like her being able to understand ten when she hears one.

Without being taught, she was could understand ten herself, and if she hears one, she can deepen that one.

That was her talent.

Chapter 12

Father's Lamentation 3

".....Milord?"

Seeing me show not even the slightest reaction after involuntarily falling into recollection, Gariya raised his voice in inquiry.

At those words, I returned to my senses.

"My apologies. Well, I was just thinking about something..... Her reason for seeking strength..... is it? It's the same as mine."

"The same... you say?"

"Yeah. Something important was stolen away out of nowhere, thus she curses her own weakness. What resulted from that was resolve."

".....in other words, she wants revenge? Even so, General chose to impart your teachings on her?"

"I said it before, right? That we were the same."

When I said that, the two of them made expressions as if they were looking at something heartbreaking.

".....well, beyond that, I have been frolicking in an unbecoming manner for having discovered her talent."

As if to blow away the solemn atmosphere, I said that as cheerfully as possible. When I did that, the two of them appeared visibly relieved.

"Watch over that child properly. And if you can, guide her. Because I am not qualified to do that. Of course, I am also worried about her."

".....I certainly shall."

“Understood.”

The two people responded with affirmative words in unison.

“Our deepest apologies for the extended visit. With this we shall excuse ourselves.”

With that, the two of them left the room.

After seeing off their backs, I left the room in order to head to the training field.

Near the training field, I caught sight of Parx and came to a stop.

Beyond Parx’s gaze was the figure of Mellice training.

He was tenderly watching her as if he found the scene charming.

Parx was also receiving my training, and hence was more than just one head above the rest of his generation.

This wasn’t just a parent seeing things favourably, but the complete truth.

But even so, his power couldn’t compare to Mellice’s.

Parx himself probably understood that more than he wanted to.

Even so, he gradually began to accept that reality, and seeing his figure watching over her so affectionately like that made me tilt my head internally.

“.....are you not vexed?”

And so, I inadvertently asked Parx thus.

As if to say that the question was unexpected, Parx dumbfoundedly looked up at me.

“Indeed..... I am a member of the Anderson Marquis House and your son. I have understood what could be called my own limits.”

Saying that, he gave a refreshing smile.

“Something like limits..... wouldn’t it be fine to just smash something like that?”

“Father. It is true that it is foolish to arbitrarily decide on your limits and give up. However, is it not essential to be able to accurately measure one’s own capacity?..... from the start, the places where *that* and I stood were different. It may be outrageous of me to say this, but I have by no means thought that I could not win against the adults

who have been undergoing father's training. However, the image of me catching up with *that* alone..... I cannot imagine it at all. It's true that seeing a real genius makes one think that even being jealous seems stupid, isn't it?"

At the appearance of my son saying that in an indifferent and calm manner, I moaned internally.

Surely, my son has, in his own way, come to a realization.
It was different from bravery and recklessness.

Ascertaining his own ability, he has recognized that there are times when he must draw back.

Even if one tried to agitate him, he retained his composure, speaking in a manner unlike that of a child who had just passed the age of 10.

When I realized that my son has his sort of interesting talent, emotions welled up.

Like he said himself, Parx was by no means weak.

He hasn't reached the point of being a good match against the subordinates of Gazelle's trusted retainers like Mellice, but he was at a level where he could perhaps win against those who had more recently begun to be trained by Gazelle.

It was a level where Gazelle hoped he'd become a top military commander when he matured.

.....however, the thought that Parx's true talent may lie in a different department rose above that hope.

Compared to myself and that girl, his fighting spirit and pure attachment to the military arts was weak.

On the other hand..... no, on top of that, he was constantly composed as he analyzed his war potential.

I felt that was a talent for a staff officer taking command on the battlefield.

".....say, Parx. Why don't you try learning battle tactics?"

Having realized that much, I nonchalantly probed Parx.

"Would that be alright!?"

At my words, Parx's face glowed.

Seeing that sole reaction which was appropriate for his age, I made a wry smile in my mind.

"In truth, I was thinking of probing father out in the near future regarding this. Since I heard the discussions of the various members of the Army who came to visit father previously, I began to hold an interest in it."

"I-Is that so? Then I shall try asking them. Once it's decided, I shall call you again."

"I look forward to it."

"Yeah, I got it."

Patting Parx's lowered head, I once again began to walk towards the training field.

.....isn't this interesting?

The front line can be left to my daughter, while my son can take care of the staff officer duties in the rear.

As the General, I will overlook everything as a whole.

That was simply a dream.

Since my daughter was a female, it was a battle formation that could never be realized. Even so, it can't be helped that I got excited when I thought of that idea.

".....perhaps shall I also train."

As if to calm myself down, I murmured thus to myself.

The guys from the Guard Corps who happened to be on stand-by at the side heard my words and, seeing my expression, retreated two, then three steps but..... well, it's fine. While I'm still drunk on this dream, why don't I enjoy myself?

Chapter 13

The Present from Father

“Melly, I have something to talk to you about. Come to my study.”

After finishing my warm-up exercises plus my training to improve physical strength, father said that to me.

Just what kind of business he has with me, I wonder?

While harbouring such a doubt, I headed towards father’s study.

It has been a while since I last walked inside of the mansion during the afternoon of such a sunny day.

After all, other than on rainy days I was basically outside doing independent practice or training, and on rainy days I was also in the indoor training arena doing some sort of training.

Full-blown training was done twice to thrice a week.

On the other days, father was also busy, so I did independent practice on my own.

From morning to evening, there were plenty of things to do – from basic strengthening, to reaffirming the stances, and various other tasks.

Although I had previously been training together with elder brother, lately after finishing with the usual training, he has been holing up in his room studying.

It seems that on top of studying the many topics he had to learn as the next Head of the House, elder brother was also studying battle tactics.

When I asked him not to work so hard to the point of collapse, I was told, “You too”, as he gave a troubled laugh while pointing at my wounds.

Ever since mother died, all of us have been like this.

It was as if a part of our hearts had frozen over.

And in order to cover that up, we each threw ourselves into doing *something*.
.....for me that *something* was training.

Just how long has it been since I last smiled from the bottom of my heart?
Even as time passed since the loss of mother, none of our wounds healed, and we continued to carry them. Not only that, but it was as if they had begun to slowly fester.

When I went to the study, father was making a stern face.

“.....I have made you wait, father.”

“No, it’s fine. Sorry for bothering you while you were training.”

“No..... what business might you have with me?”

“Umu..... I was thinking of giving this to you.”

What he passed me after saying that, was a sword.
It was slightly slender, but upon examining it, one could see that it was unlike the dulled blades of training swords. One could feel a certain weight in its pointed tip. Carved on the handle of it was the crest of the Marquis house.

“This sword is.....”

“It’s something I had ordered for you..... can you become someone worthy of wielding this sword?”

Father’s sharp gaze shot through me.
A chill rushed through me, and something cold began to run down my spine.

Unlike the swords that I had used up until now for training, this was something for causing harm to others.
He was likely asking whether or not I had the resolution to wield something like that.

.....however, what of it.
What I have been learning up until now, no matter what kind of pretty words you try to use to describe it, was something for hurting other people.

“.....if it’s father, then you have probably already realized, but from the start, I picked

up the sword to settle my own grudges. That is why, this crest..... I cannot swear upon the name of the Marquis house.”

It was not such a noble desire to protect someone.

I had, for my own sake, taken up the sword, and begun to learn it.

“That is why, I shall swear upon my name. I have pride in the things learned from father, and the many seniors who have taught me up until now, as well as the swordsmanship that I have built up. I will take responsibility so that I do not stain my own pride, and swear to wield my sword by it.”

“You spoke well..... never break those words.”

Offering up the sword, I lowered my head to father.

Chapter 14

The Thing I'm Bad With 1

Even after receiving the sword, I continued to use the practice sword for training every day as I did before.

At times, in order for my hands to get used to it, I would at most swing it around. Thinking about it carefully, for someone like me who wasn't an active soldier, it was quite obvious and natural that I wouldn't have any opportunities to wield that sword.

Nevertheless, it was true that I had become even more passionate about training than before.

Even when father went to the Capital, the Guard Corps were here and would accompany me, so I had plenty of training opponents.

Each of them had their own forte, and since all of them varied, simply watching them was educational, as it allowed me to adopt the good parts from their styles. When sparring with them, I fought while thinking of countermeasures against those styles, so that too was quite the learning experience.

When father returned, I used all my might to face him.

.....incidentally, the frequency at which father would return to the territory was rather high.

This was because father didn't return by carriage, but instead by horse. Thus, his travel speed was quite fast, and his guards were also reduced to a select few, so their group was quite agile.

Leaving that aside, no matter how much I fought against father, currently I couldn't see myself winning against him at all.

Even if I won against him during training, that was because father was going easy on me.

I still have a long ways to go.

Every time I exchanged blows with father, I am clearly shown all the parts in which I am lacking..... but that is exactly why, it makes me excited. Thinking about just what I had to do in order to win.

“Fu~

Finishing today’s training, I wiped my sweat with a towel.
The current time was just past noon.

“Ojou-sama, Ojou-sama.....!”

“Oh, Granny. Just what seems to be the matter?”

Seeing Granny run towards me hastily, I tilted my head inquisitively.
Granny is someone who has worked at this Marquis house for a long time.

For a noble lady to not learn manners is.....! —although she’d make small complaints like such, as one might expect of one who has served the Marquis house for many years, she hasn’t said anything about the training itself.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the sight of Granny trying to do what she could to make me take etiquette lessons and me defending against her offense, was already a daily scene in this Marquis house.

“Today I shall definitely make you take a lesson.”

“Even if you say that, Granny, I currently don’t have any plans to go to any tea parties. That being the case, I much rather continue training like this.”

“I too, as someone serving the Marquis House, think that Ojou-sama’s diligence is an extremely wonderful thing. However, a written invitation addressed to Ojou-sama for a tea party has arrived.”

“Oh my, Granny. With this kind of appearance, just where are you telling me to go? Please use the usual reason to turn them down.”

When I started training, it was a hindrance, so I cut my own hair.
From around the back of my ears, in a single stroke with a short blade.

If I remember properly, at that time, the first one to see me with that appearance was Granny, causing her to shriek.....

Even now, whenever it grew, I've continued to cut it.
And every time I did that, even while shrieking Granny would always even out my unsightly hair for me.

This hair that was just like a boy's.
As expected, it would be impossible to go to any other houses like this, so I have been declining all invitations.

Even now there were plenty of noble houses that hoped to make connections with the "hero" title that we held.
While it would probably be good for our house if I had gone to a few of them, father said, "It's fine for a child not mind it", so I took him up on those words.

And then when I turned all the invitations down, before I knew it, the conjuncture that I had a weak constitution began to spread around.
It seems that it had to do with the shock of mother's death..... apparently.

It's not wrong to say that losing mother lead to this opportunity, but I was currently living a life that was completely unrelated to illness.
However, it was the perfect sort of excuse to use to decline invitations, so I took advantage of those rumors and said that I was in poor shape physically.

Although I thought that the excuse would be good this time around too.....

"No, Ojou-sama. The one who invited the Ojou-sama this time was the Queen. Refusing it would be quite difficult....."

"The Queen.....?"

Just why, exactly would the Queen..... I wondered while tilting my head to the side.

"Yes. It seems that the other party is worried about Ojou-sama. We can use clothes to hide the wounds, and for your hair, I still have the remains of what Ojou-sama cut, so if we weave it to make extensions, then it should be fine."

My path of retreat was cut off by Granny.
Rather, the moment when I received an invitation from royalty, there was no path of retreat.

“Haa..... even if it’s just a pretence, something is better than nothing..... right? I’ll start taking lessons now.”

It would be unacceptable to be discourteous to royalty, so for now I began cramming in the training for tea party manners.

Chapter 15

The Thing I'm Bad With 2

"I am deeply grateful for having been invited here today."

Say that, and bow.

"The angle of the bow is wrong. Also, try to move in a more elegant manner."

Seeing my movements, the etiquette lecturer pointed out the faults.

To think that our House had employed an etiquette lecturer..... -though it was a bit too late to be surprised about something like that.

However, I think that it can't be helped that I feel that way.

Leaving elder brother aside, father takes no notice of those kinds of things, and even for me, this was the first time I've ever taken such a lesson.

When I think of it that way, I really am nothing like the noble daughter of a Marquis House.

Or rather, our family is nothing like a Marquis House..... perhaps.

"Your smile is stiff. One more time."

Every time she pointed out a fault, the teacher clapped her hands.

Somehow it feels like the sound of hands clapping will become a trauma..... -is what I thought while sighing internally.

Even though I didn't have to move as much as I did while training, as soon as the break started, an incredible sense of fatigue washed over me.

That just showed how mentally weary doing unfamiliar movements made me feel.

After practicing the first greetings again and again, in the end, the day ended with having practiced just that.

And then, the next day was a short course on how to drink tea.

.....to begin with, I normally don't drink tea.

It can't be helped, since I continue training all day long, so there wasn't any time to be elegantly drinking tea.

I involuntarily let out a sigh.

Now then, with this how many times has it been?

I just want to get back to training.

Unfortunately, yesterday I wasn't able to do any training at all, and it's likely that it will be like that today as well.

I've heard that time seems to pass slower when you're doing something that you're bad at, and it really is completely like that.

Even though a day goes by in the blink of an eye when I'm training, yesterday time felt like it was going extremely slowly.

".....that is no good. If you cut it like that, won't the bread break apart?"

With a *clap*, her hands hit together, and a warning flew over.

"Please make each bite even smaller. If you do it like that, it will be seen as shameful."

Clap!

"Please do not cut the scones that small. You will spoil the long-awaited texture of the food."

Clap!

"I said, don't make your bites that big!"

Clap!

.....it has come to the point where every time I do something, I am stopped.

With this, just how many times has the teacher clapped, causing my body to stop in reaction to that sound..... it was annoying to even try counting.

It's just a tea party. Even though it's a tea party.

.....can I really weather get through the Queen's tea party safely without incident?

.....I feel like it's impossible.

“Ojou-sama. Please focus on the lesson without thinking about unnecessary things.”

“Yess.....”

Letting out a single sigh at the sharp gaze, I focussed on the lesson.

Chapter 16

My First Campaign 1

.....and then after receiving rushed lessons, I somehow managed to give the appearance of having learned manners and headed towards the Capital.

On my feet were shoes with low heels.

My hair already had extensions attached to it, and I was, unusually, wearing a skirt.

I've become able to drink tea quietly, and if the conversation is brought my way, somehow able to answer it, but any practice that extends past that..... rather, time-wise it was impossible to have any further lessons.

The manners of nobility are deep and profound. Though it's a little late for it that is my impression of them.

While I was thinking about that, the carriage shook.

Just how many years has it been since I last rode a carriage?

Although lately I have been practicing horseback riding within the premises of our mansion.

And as I considered such vague thoughts, before I knew it, we had exited the Anderson territory.

".....such peaceful scenery."

Come to think of it, lately I haven't been able to enjoy the scenery..... I murmured while thinking.

24 hours a day, all I thought about was how to get stronger, and in reality, I spent every day without paying attention to anything but that.

It's as if I was possessed. Though it's only now that I feel that.

If mother was alive, then I probably would be going down a completely different path.

.....that's probably right.

I'm sure I would've graduated from being a tomboy, and while it wouldn't be

rushed..... as a true girl of nobility, there's no doubt that around this time I'd be undergoing regular practice.

As I imagined such a 'what-if' world, I laughed.

".....w-what seems to be the matter?"

When we advanced a little further from that point, suddenly, the speed of the carriage quickened.

In front of me, Granny asked that with an anxious voice.

"Granny, be quiet."

Feeling that auras of our guard escorts had changed, I promptly silenced Granny's mouth.

Even without asking, I understood that *something* had happened.

Because the auras of the guard escorts were tingling with bloodthirst.

While I don't know who the opponent was, right now there were people attacking us. As proof, when I checked the situation outside, I started to hear the familiar sound of swords clashing from a distance.

".....Granny, calm down."

I soothed Granny, who was trembling in front of me.

.....it can't be helped.

There probably isn't anyone who wouldn't be scared when someone suddenly attacks them.

However, my heart was strangely calm.

Instead, in order to calm my excitement, I grasped my sword tightly.

Judging from the presences, the number of enemies was high.

From the bottom of my heart, I was glad that I asserted that I'd be uneasy if my sword wasn't left close by at hand like this.

Softly opening the curtain, I looked outside from the window.

While the each of the guard escorts were taking on their respective enemy opponents, a separate group of enemies was heading straight for this carriage.

And then, the moment one of them rudely opened the door.
I reflexively pulled out my sword at my fastest speed, and using that moment, cut off that man's head.

Bushuu, a lukewarm red colour gushed out.
The smell of iron enveloped the surroundings.
It really was reflexively.

Those movements that were driven into my body until they were deeply ingrained, were reproduced without change as I swung my sword without an ounce of hesitation.

In this situation where my life was on the line, I did not have the time to be hesitating. Even though it was my first battle, I very simply took actions which would snatch away the lives of my opponents.

Momentarily, I looked at the man without a head in blank amazement.
Unlike what our house's guards were wearing, the clothes on his body were crude.
When I inspected his head just in case, it was someone that I had never seen before.

.....did I kill him?

When I thought that, a sense of nausea welled up from deep within my chest.
However, I soon returned to my senses, and straddled over the horse of the man who just died.

"What's wrong! If all of you have learned from General Gazelle, then show me that even if you lose in numbers, you can still crush the enemy!"

When I injected some morale into the guards who were being suppressed by numbers, they glanced at me in surprise.
However, they soon made serious faces, and focussed on the opponents they were exchanging blows with.

I also tore off the hair extensions and threw them away as I prepared my sword.
Inhaling, I sunk into the depths of my consciousness, honing my senses.

Feel the opponent's breathing.
Read the flow, and strike the openings.

And then, past the point between life and death, find the path to life.....!

I spoke to the instinct that was at the depths of my consciousness.

My body moved according to my imagination so well that it felt good.

The sword that I had swung many thousands, many tens of thousands of times, moved as if it were a part of my body.

And as a sign of that, it continued to harvest the lives of my opponents with extreme ease.

Chapter 17

My First Campaign 2

Nothing will change even if I think about a future of “what might have happened”.
Exhaling, I considered such as I fought.
Because the sword has already become a part of my body, and fighting techniques have been deeply ingrained into my body.

One cannot change a days that have already gone by.

On that day, at that time, I had long chosen to plunge forward onto the path of conflict like this.

It is pointless to think of a world of “what-ifs”.

My mother died, and I chose a path of conflict..... this is the result of that.

Time continues to advance forward.

No matter how much you cling and look back to it, it is impossible to return to the past.

I chose, and every passing day accumulated.

There is no way that I regretted it.

Before I knew it, there wasn't anyone in my surroundings.

My entire vicinity had been transformed into an ocean of blood, and countless corpses rolled about.

When I surveyed the surroundings to confirm the situation, it appeared that the guards had crushed each of their respective opponents.

I turned my gaze towards the single enemy that had been left alive.

That man's hips had completely let out at this current situation.

His horse to help him run away had already died, and he had no means left to help him escape this place.

When I turned my eyes towards him, the man let out a short scream as he shrunk back.

.....he seems quite afraid, huh.

Laughing sarcastically, I turned my blade towards the man.

“I-I wasn’t told this……! That the one riding was a substitute, I wasn’t told that at all!”

Somehow, it seems that he’s mistaken me for a substitute.

Well……. looking at my appearance and movements, it’s true that you wouldn’t think I was a young noble girl after all.

It’s a pain to resolve the misunderstanding, and thinking about the distant future, it’s best to take advantage of his words.

“Ojou-sama’s physical condition isn’t very good, so I came instead……. that’s why, please don’t be too surprised, everyone.”

I worded my speech in order to inform all of the guard escorts that had finished battling and suddenly regained their calm.

Everyone gave off a feeling of not really understanding, so I pushed forward.

“And so? Do you have any other comrades?”

“I-I don’t…….”

“I see. Then, what is your reason for targeting Ojou-sama?”

“I-I don’t know……!”

When I scowled at the screaming man, his face became stiff.

“It’s true! I really don’t know……! It’s just that we got information that a young lady from a Marquis House would be passing by here today, so…….”

“……It seems like there will be a need to collect evidence. You and you over there, capture this man and hand him over to father in the Capital. While you’re at it, report to him about this incident.”

“Mel will…….”

“I will return to the territory. The reason being that it would be unreasonable for me

as a body double to appear instead of Ojou-sama. If the General reports this incident to the Queen, and says that I collapsed from anxiety or such, I'm sure she will understand..... plus my hair extensions are gone now too."

If I, who has been theorized to be a young lady with a weak constitution, were to attend the party with a calm face despite something like this happening *that* in itself would unnatural.

.....though, it's really just that if I don't have to attend, then I don't want to.

Though real reason was that I didn't want to attend a party organized by royalty while I was still in a state where I could only put up a pretense, even if I have been diligently taking lessons.

Looking at the carriage, while it wasn't completely destroyed, there were quite a few scratches here and there.

The biggest problem was that the wheel was shaky and rattling.

"Granny, are you okay?"

When I called out to Granny, who was inside, her complexion was pale and drained of blood.

".....y-yes."

Granny, who gripped my extended hand, was trembling slightly.

.....the very fact that she hadn't already fainted was perhaps as expected of someone serving a Marquis House.

"Although that person said he didn't have any other comrades, we cannot determine whether or not that is the truth. Staying here would be dangerous, so let's hurry up and go..... all the more for the two heading to the Capital while bringing a prisoner with them. Also, it may be rather hard for her, but someone let her on their horse."

I gripped the reins.

"Well then, disperse."

As soon as I said that, I had my horse break into a run.

Other than the two guards going to the Capital, the rest followed after me.

And so, in the end I returned to the mansion without going to the Capital.

Chapter 18

Father's Encounter 1

“.....excuse me.”

The one whose room I went to without an appointment was someone that even I had difficulties dealing with.

I forcefully pushed my way in, but other than the person I was looking for, there were several civil officials in the room.

Even when I suddenly entered, that person was extremely calm.

“Marquis Anderson, is it? Sorry, but please wait for a little longer..... you, circulate these documents around to each of the related departments. Also, this paper can pass as is, but the other two have to be returned. There's a contradiction here and here. It may have been a mistake to simply just have sent it around, or perhaps there was insufficient cooperation..... also, I looked over this schedule, but it's too optimistic. Probably, just getting confirmation alone with this amount will take at least one week. It's fine to urge them on, but try adapting to the situation itself.”

The master of the room that I called out to as he worked in a composed manner..... was Duke Romel Jib Armelia.

He was the exact opposite of me, a noble-like noble with gentle facial features.

One of the top nobles of this country, he was the head of the Armelia Duke House, and the Prime Minister.

Contrary to his soft demeanor, he was evaluated as someone with a sharp sense for politics.

And right now at this time, he was bringing about a majesty appropriate for all of his titles.

In reality, the eyes of the men he was giving orders to were shining.

The other people in the room who were waiting for orders, opened their ears so as to avoid missing even a single word.

It was a sign that they felt pride in being able to work as his hands and feet.

“The rest of you too, take home and consider the respective topics I gave you, and give me a proposal tomorrow.”

After he gave out his last orders, everyone bowed and left the room one by one. And then, the only ones left in the room were its master, Romel, and me alone.

“My bad, I made you wait.”

At that moment, Romel’s tone of voice changed to that of one you might hear from some guy in a bar, and the majesty that he had up until then was blown away.

“How to say, I can’t get used to that sudden change of attitude of yours.....”

As Gazelle let out a wry smile, Romel laughed magnificently.

“Really? Even though you say that, last time you were pretty calm, you know?”

.....it was a coincidence.

That I saw Romel in his current form.

At the bar situated in a corner of the Capital that I was invited by my subordinates to, I saw a man that I felt like I had seen somewhere before..... -is what I thought, and that man turned out to be Romel.

Unbelievably, Romel was mixing together with commoners and drinking.

.....even though he was the Prime Minister, and the head of a leading noble family.

“Iyaa, everyone’s surprised faces at the time were quite the sight to see, you know? It’s pretty admirable that you didn’t end up yelling out my name.”

“At that time, if you hadn’t covered my mouth and said you’d explain everything later, I would have yelled.”

“Even if I said I’d explain everything..... it’s as it looked. The man in front of your eyes right now is Romel Jib Armelia. That’s all.”

“.....is the usual you wearing a mask?”

At my question, Romel laughed as though he were having fun.
And after laughing for a while, the look in his eyes suddenly became sharp.

It was sharp to the point where one would feel threatened by it.
His tone of voice remained as it was, and was as affable as usual.
As expected of the Prime Minister, I sighed from the bottom of my heart.

“Oi oi, like hell there’s anyone within this palace who isn’t wearing a mask. In this den of demons, it’s an everyday occurrence to probe out each other’s real intentions, while at the same time making plots to sabotage others. Ohh, how very scary..... my mask is just a bit thicker is all.”

“I see..... however, why was the Duke at that kind of bar?”

“.....at *that* kind of bar, you say. Is it really *that* odd for me to be there?”

It did give the impression that I was pigeonholing myself, but between me being in a bar and Romel being in a bar, the latter was definitely more surprising to an overwhelming extent.

“Rather than odd..... if I may be frank, it was unexpected.”

“My old man often used to tell me to ‘know the people’. It’s the same as in military tactics. Know your enemies, right? If you want to properly rule over the people, and you don’t know about the other party at all, then you won’t go anywhere. That’s why, ever since I was young, I’d slip into places throughout the town and listen to all kinds of things. Well, at some point, I ended up stuck with this kind of speech, ‘cause I found it much more comfortable being at ease over there instead.”

“It is quite respectable of your father to say such a magnificent thing. For you to put that into actual practice is also something to look up to. However, at the same time it is frightening.”

At Gazelle’s words, Romel grinned broadly as the corners of his mouth rose.
It was a smile as though a mischievous child’s prank had succeeded.

If, to Romel, his “war” was “ruling”, then his “enemies” consisted of everyone other than the king living in this country.
Because he was a duke, he was familiar with nobles, and he was also learning about

the common people like this.

To begin with, he had a sharp sense for politics. Putting that together with his knowledge of his “enemies”, if he felt like it, then he could easily have his opponents rolling around in the palm of his hand, I thought.

“.....so? Just why have you come to my place today? Don’t tell me, you only came to talk about something like that?”

“That’s.....”

Seeing me falter with my words, Romel let out a sigh.

“I see..... I was sure that you had come to consult me but..... I guess it was just me being conceited.”

“Consult.....?”

“Perhaps I should say something like.....”General Gazelle, I am truly sorry for guessing upon your worries. I am, at any time, willing to be your strength. Regarding the apprehension of the bandits. Please feel free to speak with me about it.”

“.....ahh!”

At my reaction that spoke as if I had just remembered, Romel gave a wry smile.

“What, I kn~ew you forgot. It was correct of me to have gone to the bar at that time.”

Hearing the last few words that Romel murmured, I involuntarily allowed a reaction to show on my face.

“Don’t tell me..... you were at the bar in order to make me come..... here?”

At my question, Romel grinned broadly as a suspicious smile appeared on his face.

Chapter 19

Father's Encounter 2

It was mostly just intuition.

However, they were words too precise to simply shrug off as merely being his imagination.

While thinking that it was impossible, that it had to have been just a coincidence..... but, compared to him going to that bar simply because his father told him to get to know the people, it was a much more convincing reason.

Because presently, I was here.

"It is true that I normally go to bars, ya know? I explained it earlier as well..... but, that is true....."

His eyes as he said that with a wry smile burned with a dubious light.

"That, 'in this world, there's no such thing as coincidence'."

For a moment, I was overwhelmed by him, and went into a daze.

"That's impossible..... the reason why I went there that day was because my subordinate called me. It was a complete coincidence. It couldn't be that you ordered my subordinate.....?"

"You do know that it's pretty damn hard to get one of those guys who, more than simply respect, but worship you, to take you out."

"Then, just how.....?"

"When people take action, I believe that there are internal and external factors that lead them to do so. The internal factors are, in brief, their way of thinking. That depends on their respective personalities and can be guessed at if you take into consideration their usual conduct. And so, the external factors include things that have

already happened, and things that will happen in the future. Taking all of that into account, this was the result that was brought out.”

I got goosebumps at how Romel spoke as if it was nothing.
I’d still be more convinced it he had said it was just a coincidence.

“This time’s prediction was simple. After all, you went drinking with the guys from the previous group, right? Well, the group this time heard about that, so there’s no way they wouldn’t take you out to drink on the last day of training.”

It is true that ever since I took the position as General, I have gone to observe the training of many people.

The country requested that I do so for people other than my direct subordinates, but..... as there were so many aspiring candidates, I divided them into groups and went to observe them periodically.

Like he said, it is true that on the last day of the group I was observing previously, I was invited to go out drinking.

However, that was something that happened only once several months ago.

Leaving aside those who were enlisted in the army, for someone who was working as the Prime Minister like Romel to know the precise details of the training schedule, to the point where he even knew they went out to drink, surprised me.

“Just how far reaching are your eyes and ears?”

“It’s only natural to know the movements of the army as the Prime Minister. As for the drinking, well, if you don’t try and hide it, then of course people’s mouths are gonna run. I have ears in the town’s bars, you know? Since you’re famous.”

“In any case, I’m surprised you knew. Even though it was a different shop than before.”

“If you go to a lot of places, then you’ll come to know which ones are frequented by knights.”

I felt a bone-deep chill run through me.

Just how much has the man in front of me seen through to.....! –I thought.

It was no longer a mere prediction. It was foresight.

He connects all the various points scattered here and there, makes a conjecture, and then intervenes to bring about the result that he desires.

This is this country's Prime Minister, I shuddered.

".....having gone that far, why are you seeking my assistance?"

"Well of course, 90% of it is due to my interests as the Prime Minister..... right now, you're someone that this country can't afford to lose. You have popularity amongst the masses, and your very existence itself serves as a deterrent to other countries. In reality, the negotiations with Towair Country went smoothly because you were there..... that's why it would be troublesome to crush you if you became disgusted with this country's graces."

"The country, is it?"

"That's right."

".....I understand your power. I ask this while knowing that, but just what sort of assistance can you give me? It may be rude of me to say this, but I do not think that you have any fighting power."

"That's true..... I'd probably even lose to your daughter too."

At Romel's words, I stiffened.

Though I've been given continuous surprises up until now, I still haven't gotten used to it.

Just how much could this man see through?

"Surely you jest. My daughter has a weak constitution, and simply cannot bear to fight."

"Even though that sickly daughter easily mowed down a bunch of bandits recently?"

Romel cackled, looking at me with a gaze filled with certainty.

I quickly sensed that, and let out a single sigh.

"Just for reference but..... how did you know? At the very least, the outside story is

that my daughter's body double that was concurrently acting as her guard took care of it."

"The first reason is the distance from the Capital that she was attacked. A decoy is something that should be sent far ahead of oneself. If you were to have a single guard acting separately as a decoy, then doing it that way would be more efficient. However, the location of the decoy was somewhere where they'd just barely be able to make it to the tea party if they went at their fastest speed. Would you really make a weakly ojou-sama go on a forced march? – is what I thought."

".....and the second?"

".....intuition."

Hearing Romel's words, I laughed for the first time since my arrival.

"That answer's quite unlike you."

"I think so too. Just..... I saw with my own eyes, and felt it. That was the main reason for my conviction."

"Even though my daughter has never even left the territory?"

"I attended your wife's funeral, right?"

".....ahh....."

"You know, it gave me the chills. Amongst everyone, only she was focussing on the future. While despairing at the irrationality of reality, her strength that didn't yield to it..... a flame dwelled within those eyes."

As I listened to Romel's words, my eyes narrowed.

.....it was the same.

The same as the feelings that I had once felt from her.

"Though I don't know if she's got talent in the military arts. But it wasn't likely that your daughter would fall ill 'because' of the loss of her mother. She'd kick aside the sickness, and run past it. If she were a man, I'd want to have her train under me."

“Don’t you have a son?”

“She’d train together with my son under me. If the two of them join forces, it seems like they’d be able to do some pretty interesting things..... well, it’d be quite an extravagant thing to do.”

“No doubt. She’s female, and above all else, I’m also looking forward to how far she can refine her martial arts. That’s why I can’t hand her over to you.”

“Kukuku..... I thought so. Well, we’ve gone off topic but..... it is true that I lack combat power. However, do you not think I have quite a bit as a civil official? In order to make it easier for you to move, I’ll back you up as much as possible. If we join forces..... it won’t only be the bandits. We’ll be able to crush everyone behind those bandits too.”

“Behind..... the bandits?”

“What, you haven’t investigated that far yet? Then it’ll be a secret until you ally with me.”

“Kukuku..... hahaha.....!”

I laughed.

A grand laugh, from the bottom of my stomach.

My laughter caused the room’s furnishings to quake..... it was that big a laugh.

“Interesting, how interesting. You will accompany until I complete my revenge..... is it alright to think that it is for that purpose you will be making things easier for me? Is it fine for me to wield all my power entirely for my own sake?”

A feeling of completion welled up from the depths of my heart.

Just how wonderful a thing it would be to be able to use all of your strength and move without having to think about the consequences?

My true nature, in the end, was simply that of a single soldier..... having just realized that, I laughed at myself.

It wasn’t bad to run around the battlefield as a General.

Rather, to influence the progress of a battle according to my will excited me.

However, during peacetime, the title of General was already nothing more than a pair of shackles.

It had numerous duties and negotiations.

The country and the people all swarmed to share in my glory.

Even though I entered the army in order to run away from the aristocratic society that I detested, before I knew it, I was completely submerged in the middle of it despite my opinion.

The ones approaching would give a friendly smile, in attempts to draw out the best terms for themselves.

Like I care about something like that! –is what my true feelings were, but when I thought of my subordinates, I was unable to run away from it.

Those sort of burdens made it harder and harder for me to move.

“Of course. I took great pains to join hands after all..... first off, do something about that stuffy way of speaking.”

“My bad! Then, once again..... I must say, I’ll be in your care!”

“Damn right.”

And so, Tasmeria Kingdom’s Prime Minister Romel, and I, the General, firmly joined hands.

Chapter 20

My Frustration 1

Clang clang..... the sounds of swords clashing resounded.

“That’s it! Winner, Das!”

The referee loudly declared my opponent’s name.

While letting out a sigh, I put away the sparring sword and left the arena.

It was the usual training menu.

However, the scenery reflected in my eyes was not the usual one.

Here is the Anderson Marquis House’s villa in the Capital.

After that bandit uproar, I secretly came to this Capital’s villa.

.....for some reason, it was under the established setting of me being a guard/body double.

The real me was overly shocked at the bandit uproar and collapsed, and apparently is currently in the remote countryside in the Anderson Marquis Territory undergoing medical treatment.

.....well, it probably was a problem for a child of nobility like myself to be wielding a sword out in the open.

Well, that was fine.

In the Capital, it wasn’t only the Guard Corps participating in father’s training, but also people from the Army and the Knight’s Order, so the variety of opponents has increased.

There were quite a few new discoveries, so it was fun.

Even if I became unable to use Ojou-sama’s..... rather, the original me’s room, and had to use a guest room instead.

Thanks to that, I became accustomed to taking care of my daily necessities by myself.

.....somehow, I feel like my lifestyle is drifting further and further away from that of a Marquis’ noble daughter.

Leaving that aside, I don't understand father's true motive.
.....why did he bring me back to the Capital with this timing?

Speaking of things I don't understand, there was also father's current state.
I don't know why, but ever since my bandit uproar, I feel like father has been very lively.

It was as if a burden was lifted from his shoulders, and he had returned to being my original father.....

Well..... even if I say that he's changed, somehow it feels like it's towards a good direction, so it's fine.

It's been a while since I last saw him raising his voice and laughing together with his subordinates.

Also, father isn't the only one who's changed.
I have as well.

On that day, at that time, I fought for the first time.
It wasn't a spar like right now.

It was a real battle with the lives of people on the line.
I will probably never forget that moment.
For a while after that, I was unable to eat.
It'd suddenly become painful, and there were plenty of nights where I couldn't sleep.

However, there's never been a time when I was more aware of my own life than that time.

My blood became hot as if it was boiling, but my consciousness deep within me was terribly cold, and the unsurpassable degree of tension caused my body to tremble.

That sensation clung to the depths of my body and would not go away.

.....despite that. No, perhaps because of that.

Lately I have been in a bad condition.

The match just now was the same, but I've become completely unable to win my matches.

My body couldn't keep up with my mental image.

Because of that, I unintentionally become irritated.

.....not good.

I am still weak.

To say that my body can't keep up with my mental image, just what kind of weak-hearted things am I saying?

As if to admonish myself, I gripped my fist tightly.

"Oi, Mel! They're telling us to gather."

"Yes!"

I was called by my senpai, and followed after him.

Having been called by that name all this time, I've completely gotten used to it.

While I was walking, the gazes of the surrounding people who were also gathering there pierced into me to the point where it hurt.

I let out a sigh internally at this situation.

.....at the Anderson Marquis territory, it was also like this when I first started participating in the training.

However, I feel like compared to before, the current situation was much worse.

It was probably also due to the fact that I was smaller compared to other people.

Why is such a little girl, this weak person, participating in the General's training that everyone is yearning for..... the voices of their hearts were so clear that I could probably pick them up with my hand.

However, more than that, the reactions of the knights who were nobles..... maybe I should just say that their gazes hurt.

I was tentatively a guard plus body double, but to outsiders it meant that I had become a commoner.

For the knights who had never spent time together with commoners up until now, their ability to interact with commoners was extremely bad.

Those from the Army also appeared to have some complaints, and if I had to say, I did as well.

Though amongst those from the Army, it seemed that father's close associates were taking an attitude of their own.

When in Rome, do as Romans do..... I probably wasn't the only one thinking that.
(*T/N: I know Rome doesn't exist in this world, but this saying seemed to fit best in English.)*

When the training ended, I went inside the mansion.

Chapter 21

My Frustration 2

“Mel, Master is calling.”

Granny, who came to greet me, called out.

Just when I was about to answer, Granny quickly brought her mouth close to my ear.

“.....the young master was also called, and is already in Master’s drawing room.”

Granny was the only servant that knew I was not a body double.

Even though she had been exposed to that kind of situation, Granny continued to serve me without change.

I truly am thankful for Granny’s existence.

While thinking that, I continued walking within the Marquis’ Capital villa that I hadn’t quite gotten used to yet.

When I entered father’s room, a man other than brother was also there.

“Oji-san!”

I..... or rather, the person who was sitting with their back facing the entrance was called out to.

“Ohh, so Jou-chan also came? Right now I’m in the middle of something with the Young Master, so wait a bit.”

Romel-san turned around momentarily and said that to me before once again turning towards my elder brother.

It seems that they were playing a board game.

Based on his expression, it seemed that elder brother was on the losing end.

I stared fixedly at the game unfolding between the two, entranced.

Even if I looked at the board, I didn't understand how the game was moving. While it was also because I was bad at the game, there was also the fact that the two of them were at such a highly advanced stage of gameplay.

Oji-san..... or rather, Romel-san, is apparently father's close friend.

I say 'apparently' because he was introduced that way.

Apparently they met at a bar and hit it off, so he would occasionally come to talk with father, or play a game with elder brother like this.

Although Oji-san was a commoner..... no, perhaps it was because of that?..... it was easy to understand, even from an outsider's perspective that he really got along well with father.

At a glance, he seemed like an uncle you could find anywhere.

.....if you looked very carefully, you'd see that his facial features were actually quite well arranged, but because of his appearance and conduct, he didn't stand out that much.

Elder brother gave up the game.

"Oi oi, Young Master. It's still too early to give up. Isn't there still a road left here?"

"Ah!"

After looking at the place where Oji-san pointed to, elder brother let out a vexed voice.

"Your move four turns ago was bad. If you put this there, then I would have had to go on the defensive. And if you had done this..... see, it would've been a good match, right? At times like these, you choose the safe route. In our second match two weeks ago, you did the same thing, remember?"

One by one, Oji-san pointed out elder brother's faults.

Elder brother listened seriously, not letting a single one of those words escape him.

It seems that board game sports originated from what was used during the making of a strategy.

Hence, ever since elder brother began to genuinely learn about military tactics, he began to have an interest in board games.

Elder brother's skill continuously showed signs of going up, to a level where all the

adults were astonished.

If it was the people who came for training, he had a complete victory against them in all matches. If those who took part in making military strategies were his opponent, then he would win 2 out of every 3 matches.

That elder brother was always being beaten black and blue by Oji-san.

I truly wondered what his brain was made of. If possible, I'd love to be able to see what was going on inside of his head just once.

"Now then. How about it? Is the Young Master satisfied?"

".....yes, I suppose so. Until you come again, I will also review this time's battle as well."

"Ou, do that. Iyaa, every time I come, the Young Master gets strong, so it's quite fun."

Romel-ojisan guffawed.

In contrast to that, while a smile surfaced on elder brother's face, a strong will to battle burned within his eyes.

I instinctively became spellbound by those eyes.

I have never really seen my elder brother become so attached to a single thing.

.....rather, as expected, ever since mother died, the fact that he has only been moving while thinking of how to become a good family head of the Marquis house played a big role in that.

Not only that, but because elder brother was able to skillfully handle everything needed to become the family head, I haven't ever seen him experience any setbacks.

But the elder brother in front of my eyes right now is different.

Somehow it seems like he's having fun.

He was honestly displaying his emotions on his face like when he was younger.

Somehow, it made me feel things were becoming enjoyable as well.

.....well, the contents of what was being said surprised me quite a bit though.

The 'review' that elder brother spoke of involves a complete reproduction of how the match proceeded, and using that, he'd consider which moves were bad and such.

In other words, without exception, he remembered every single one of the matches

that he's played.

It wasn't only Romel-ojisan, but elder brother's head that was made differently from my own.

"Why did Oji-san start playing board games?"

"Hmm? Well, of course it's 'cause they were fun."

"Oji-san, it'd be great if you became a strategist. I may be partial to him because we're related, but there aren't many strategists that can have such a complete victory against elder brother like this."

"War and board games are not truly similar, Jou-chan."

Oji-san played around with a game piece in the palm of his hand.

"Is that so?"

"Yup. The surface of the board is a level playing field. In addition, the pieces themselves have predetermined rules and do not possess their own thoughts..... if it's the Young Master, then you understand the meaning of this, right?"

"On the battlefield, a more three-dimensional point of view is required of you, correct?"

".....for example?"

"The weather, terrain..... Also, the scale of your own army, as well as its ability and morale. The same applies to your opponent."

"It's like that. One must know the heavens, know the earth..... and also know one's enemy and know oneself. On top of that, you must know what you hope to accomplish before starting the war. Depending how you prepare for it, the conclusion will differ – is what I believe. Well, to learn one part of that, this board game is a good teaching material. Just....."

Saying that, Oji-san placed the game piece on the board.

He didn't just place it down, but used the piece he was holding to mow down all the

others that were on the board.

“Like this, there are some guys that have military power capable of blowing away those kinds of plans entirely. Like your father.”

While making a bitter smile, Oji-san let out a sigh.

“.....based on what I’ve heard from you, I really do think that Oji-san would make a good strategist.”

“I’ve already found my own battlefield..... even while I drink, it is a splendid battle. Right, Gazelle?”

Saying that, Oji-san tilted the cup in his hand.

“That’s right. A battle from which you can’t retreat from is there.”

For some reason, father also had a cup of alcohol.

“On that note, let’s have another drink. This is about to run out.”

“Well, we can’t have that now.”

As the two of them laughed loudly, they clinked their glasses.

.....somehow, it feels like their words from earlier completely went to waste.

Elder brother hastily moved from his seat.

Yeah, the smell of alcohol was quite intense.

“Jou-chan. If you make such an irritable face, the God of Fortune will run away.”

Oji-san rubbed my head vigorously.

“If you stay that tense all the time, you’ll end up snapping at an important time. If you want, how about drinking with us?”

“Oji-san, I’m underage.”

“It’s a joke, just a joke. See, isn’t your old man glaring at me now?”

“Of course.”

As father said that, he truly continued to glare at Oji-san, but even so he still appeared to be having fun.

Seeing his appearance, I also laughed involuntarily.

.....just how long has it been?

For it to be this cheerful in the house.

It was so dear, and it made me become sad at that nostalgic scene that will no longer return.

I always want to see it, -thinking that, I narrowed my eyes.

However, time continues to march forward.

The illusion of the past that was far too gentle made my resolve weaken.

“.....Oji-san, I was happy to see you today. Please come again, okay?”

Saying farewell to that scene, I once again headed towards the training arena.

Chapter 22

My Frustration 3

The afternoon training had those from the Knight's Order mixed in with us. After completing the usual menu, the sparring matches began.

My opponent was one of the youths from the Knight's Order. At the very least, within this Anderson Marquis estate, it was a face I was seeing for the first time.it seems that amongst the youths of the Knight's Order, he was being called their 'hope', a person whose future was greatly anticipated. He possessed a sharp and fast swordsmanship that fit his reputation.

Every time we exchanged blows, I could understand that the pressure on me was gradually increasing. While I did that, I stepped in too deep and conversely ended up falling into the opponent's pace until eventually my sword was sent flying away.

.....really, just what has happened to me?
My body won't move the way I want it to.
Even though I know, I can't react.

".....that's it! The winner is Donaldy!"

The referee's declaration resounded. I reflexively bit my lips in chagrin, at my own weak-mindedness.

".....I heard that you were General Gazelle's prized child and was looking forward to it..... but in the end, you're only at this level, huh."

As if he were spitting, my opponent..... Donaldy, spoke.

"Don't misunderstand. It is only because you were close in age to Gazelle-sama's daughter that you were selected to be her guard, and because of that duty, you were able to receive instructions from Gazelle-sama himself. It does not change the fact that

you are a commoner. It is unpleasant that someone like you is thick-skinned enough to undergo training in this Anderson Marquis House.”

After he said that and left the area, I was unable to say anything in return. Honestly, I wanted to ask, *who is that prized child?* – And had plenty of things that I wanted to retort about.

However, his words pierced my chest.

I can't deny the fact that I have been blessed by the environment that I was born into.

After all, when I first started to learn how to use the sword, I was able to receive teachings from General Gazelle, who is the country's long-admired hero. Something that countless soldiers on active duty and knights desired, but are unable to obtain, was something that I received as if it were the most natural thing in the world. That was probably something that couldn't have been done unless I had been blessed.

It was embarrassing.

It was mortifying.

I may have, without realizing it, become haughty.

.....I thought that I had become stronger.

I thought that I had become stronger, and had begun to be recognized by those around me.

When I was receiving training in the Anderson Marquis territory, the attitude of those from the Army that were undergoing the same training softened towards me. And that was how I took the meaning of their actions to represent.

However, perhaps it wasn't like that in reality.

It may have simply been because they saw father's figure behind me.

That was the reason why.

Despite that, since coming to the Capital I haven't been able to secure a single win. As such, they probably have conversely become annoyed at my presence.

.....it even made me begin to feel that it could be that back in the territory, it wasn't just that their attitude had softened, but they had also been going easy on me during spars.

My thoughts rapidly began to spiral in a bad direction..... but there's no way I could cry here, so I hardened my mind.

And then, enduring it until training ended, the moment it finished..... I went out to town.

I did not want to cry at home.

I couldn't cry.

I didn't want my father, my brother, Granny, or anyone to find out.

Not just about the fact that I cried, but the reason why.

It might be a tiny bit of pride, but I did not have the courage to wound it any further.

The place I headed for was a tower within the Capital.

It was a place my father brought me to the other day.

Naturally, to enter the tower one needed to get past the soldiers on lookout, but as they were members undergoing training at our home, they were my acquaintances.

As such, they easily let me through.

Climbing the long, long stairs, I arrived at the top of the tower.

The scenery here that overlooked the Capital was very wonderful.

Though, since it was built to be used as a lookout post in times of emergency, it wasn't open to the general public.

But that was exactly why I came to this place where you could see such beautiful scenery, as it made it so I could be completely alone.

The first time I came here and saw the scenery, I was deeply moved.

However, right now with my teary eyes, I couldn't even see that very scenery.

The moment I thought I was alone, the feelings that I had been enduring up until now overflowed, and together with them, tears began to fall, one after the other.

“.....uu..... Uuuuuuu—!”

It was mortifying.

It was embarrassing.

.....it was wretched.

Aren't I like a buffoon?

When they saw me, everyone looked past me and saw my father.

Despite that, I.....

The negative feelings that accumulated in my heart heavily weighed it down, making my chest hurt.

Even if I cried, it didn't get even the slightest bit lighter.

Instead, it only got heavier.

It was the moment when I opened my mouth, wanting to cry out.

I heard the sound of something clattering.

Chapter 23

My Frustration 4

“.....who!?”

As if taking out my anger on them, I questioned the other party that I had yet to see in a cold voice.

“I should be the one asking, who are you? This isn’t a place that a child should be entering.”

Standing there was a boy slightly older than me.

“.....you yourself do not appear to be a member of the authorized personnel here.”

“I came here previously with my father on an inspection. Since then, the job of inspecting this place was tentatively left to me..... and so? You are?”

“.....m-my father is..... someone involved with the army. I was also brought here by him before. The gatekeepers here are also my acquaintances.....”

It was very hard to say.

The boy that I had taken my anger out on had a reason to be here.

On the other hand, I simply came here because of my selfish desire to be alone.

That too, was something I could only do because of my father’s name.

Earlier, I had become lost at the sheer size of my father’s existence. Even though I was crying due to feeling ashamed at my own weakness that rendered me unable to fly out of his grasp, I was, in the end using my father’s name.

The heated emotions that seemed like they were going to explode a moment ago suddenly cooled.

“So that’s why they let you in here?”

“.....I-I’m sorry. Even though I came in due to personal reasons, I used that tone of voice with you in asking who you were. I will leave immediately.....”

“.....wait.”

He stopped me as I stood up.

“I played it cool and said it was my duty, but it isn’t an official appointment. I like the view from here, so when I received permission from my father to come here, as part of the deal, I was to report about the status of this place..... and such. It’s really just a lenient condition that he added on the side. That’s why I don’t have the qualifications to find fault with you for being here. Of course, if you were completely unrelated to this place, and just snuck in here for an adventure, then I’d have a headache wondering what was going on with the guards here.....”

.....I’ve caused some trouble for the gatekeepers here.

Though it may be rather late of me to think this, I felt like my head was about to start hurting at my own foolishness.

“.....rather, my apologies. I didn’t speak up and ended up eavesdropping on you.”

“You’re not at fault. Even though you’re not..... I.....”

And then, I slowly began to tell him about my situation.

Using the guard setting that my father created for me.

In the middle of it, he sat next to me and quietly listened.

“.....it’s quite natural to be told that.”

After hearing my story, those were the first words he spoke.

Like I thought..... it felt as if a heavy rock was suffocating my chest.

“What need is there to cry that much? Is it not the truth that you are in a blessed environment? The man’s words with regards to that is the truth. Though..... it is nonsense that isn’t worth listening to.”

“Even though it’s the truth, it’s nonsense?”

“It’s because it’s the truth. Something that has happened in reality. Just a single thing

that can never be overturned. It is a person, subjective opinion about that truth. It is just that man's interpretation of the fact that you were taught the sword by your father."

".....I don't really get it."

"Putting it simply, he's just jealous. Using the truth as a shield, he's just attacking you by putting his feelings into words. If you keep minding each and every person that does that, you won't hold up."

"But, it's true that I was lacking in power....."

"So what?"

I became speechless at his query.

"It is fine to feel ashamed when your own power is insufficient. However, there is no need to abase yourself because of it. It is fine to just look forward, facing your goal and advancing towards it. There is no need to mind such nonsense."

".....only looking forward....."

"That's right. For what purpose are you practicing military arts?..... if you don't have a reason for not letting it go, then just quit it. Because in the future, there will likely be plenty of guys like that man."

The boy's words heavily resounded in my chest.

.....that's right, I have a goal.

No matter how difficult, or how painful, even if there isn't anything to gain from it in the future.

I will not forgive the ones who stole away my precious person. I will definitely make them face retribution.

I had resolved myself to do that.

That was precisely why I averted my eyes from that scene that was far too gentle.

Not enough power?..... then I should just train more.
The people around me don't approve of me?..... I wasn't looking for their approval to begin with.

I was simply seeking power for the sake of the result that I desired.
When I thought that, it felt like my eyes had opened up.

".....thanks. I feel very refreshed."

"I see."

"Though it does seem like that advice comes from personal experience."

".....probably because I also am always telling myself such things."

".....then you and I are the same."

"Indeed."

I stared at him fixedly.

Although he had handsome features, he gave off the impression of being scary rather than beautiful. This was probably because he was constantly surrounded by a sharp air.

Judging from his body frame, he probably wasn't seriously pursuing the military arts..... well firstly, it doesn't seem like I'd lose to him.

Even so, I wonder why.
In a different sense, I couldn't beat him.
I had that sort of feeling.

".....my name is Melly. I don't know if we'll meet again, but best regards."

For some reason, I did not name myself as Mel, but instead used the nickname that my father calls me with.

"My name is Rui..... nice to meet you."

And so, we exchanged handshakes.

Chapter 24

My Resolve

Like always, I swing my sword.

After tracing through a series of forms, I imagined Donaldy's movements within my head. And then, as if I were fighting him, I moved my body.

.....it won't reach him, huh.

Around the time when I felt chagrin at losing and began to wipe my sweat, people from the same unit as my father began to appear here and there, similarly starting their own training.

".....you're working hard right in the morning."

Before I realized it, father was standing nearby.

"Gazelle-sama! Good morning."

Since we were outside, I greeted father in an appropriate manner for my guard status.

"Umu, morning..... how about it? Would you have a match with me?"

"By all means. Please take care of me."

And so, I began to fight with my father using a sparring sword.

Clang, the sound of swords clashing reverberated.

I cannot win in a battle of brute force, so I quickly fell back.

"Your swordsmanship has changed."

Father suddenly muttered during our spar.

"It has become more practical. The reasoning behind it is good. However..... I can feel hesitation."

“.....hesitation, is it?”

“Indeed. Even though you resolutely aim at the opponent’s vitals when swinging your sword, just before you touch the opponent, that resolution weakens. That half-heartedness is creating an opening.”

.....my sword is... weakening?

It is true that lately my movements don’t overlap with my mental image, so I have been feeling a sense of discomfort.

So *that* was the cause of it.

“In reality you have had an encounter in which lives were taken..... so it cannot be helped even if you have become afraid of wielding the sword. That is why I have permitted it up until now.”

Father’s sword repelled my own.

“.....however, if you intend on being like that from now on..... abandon the sword.”

A cold gaze.

As if he were looking down at me, his sharp gaze stabbed into me.

Father’s relentless words which were just as sharp pierced my chest.

His expression was so serious it was scary.

“If you think about it, the sword is a tool for murder. To take it into hand, one needs to have the resolve to kill your opponent and the resolve to be killed yourself. When you received the sword from me, did you not say that you had that intention already?”

“.....yes.”

“However, if that resolve has been crushed, then throw away the sword. And never again enter the premises of this training arena.”

The air had frozen over.

And then in the next instant, father faced me and swung his sword.

I dodged that swing.

He was different from the usual father.

His spirit was oppressing to a painful degree.

“What’s wrong! Was your resolve that weak!?”

Without even being able to pick up the sword that had been hit away, I simply continued to dodge father’s sword.

That angry bellow stung my skin.

It’s scary.

.....scary?

Was my resolve *that* weak?

Was the thing that I cultivated, the thing that I spent so much time on, something that would collapse this easily?

.....no.

No, no, that’s wrong!

I swore that I wouldn’t lose to irrationality.

I swore that I would take revenge on everything that had stolen mother away from me.

Even if I had to throw everything away.

Even if there was nothing to gain from it.

From the start, I didn’t hold such weak feelings that would allow me to simply laugh and say, “*I tried hard, this is my limit*”, stopping where I was while giving up.

I would persist in my selfishness.

Even if I had to use my surroundings for that sake.

I would complete my objective.

.....that being the case, there’s no way I could let myself be defeated by father in a place like this.

Once I decided that in my heart, my hand naturally extended towards the sword.

And then, I swung it.

My body reacted exactly like how I imagined in my head.

Father’s movements..... no, even the time being carved into the world felt like it was going slower.

Speedily, I dove close into father's bosom.

And then, I deflected away father's sword with a *clang*.

Father was late in reacting to my movements, and his sword offered little resistance as it flew upwards.

Aiming for that gap, I placed my sword against father's neck.

"..... I have indeed witnessed your resolve."

Hearing that one line, I drew back.

"I must also thank you..... thanks to Gazelle-sama, I have remembered an important thing."

After saying my thanks with a smile, I returned to the mansion to wash off the sweat.

Chapter 25

Senpai's Question

"Oh, you're quite early."

"Good morning, Kuroitsu-san."

The one who called out to me was Kuroitsu-san.

A helpful person who somehow seemed to worry about me often.

He was father's right arm, and was strong.

He had a good, hard body, and though his face appeared a little stern, he was an open-hearted and kind person.

"Hm, those are good eyes. Yesterday you were making a pretty bad face, but seeing that it seems that you'll be fine today."

".....I apologize for making you worry."

"I'm just worrying of my own accord. Don't mind it."

He gently stroked my head with light taps.

His actions were extremely natural and his large hand felt very warm.

Not long after that, the basic training started.

Basic training simply involves warm-up exercises that loosen up the body or movements done in order to increase one's physical strength.

As the knights fundamentally do not participate in these exercises, there are few people assembled here.

When I was first handed the contents of the training, even though it was the same as now, I could not handle it at all.

Even so, I held on and continued with it, and now I can do it as if it were natural.

Today, I will do more than yesterday.

Tomorrow, I will do more than today.

Bit by bit, I polish my body.

Bit by bit, I become capable of doing what I previously was unable to do.

In other words, everything that I've done up until now was by no means futile.

.....the reason why I'm able to have such positive thinking is surely thanks to that boy named Rui that I met yesterday.

Once the basic training finished, we immediately began the mock battles.

It is in this part of the training where the knights begin to participate, but today I don't see Donaldy around.

.....well, fine. I will probably see him here eventually.

It's just a matter of how much I will grow until that time.

Becoming even stronger than I am now.

As I thought about that, I realized that my heart was throbbing with excitement, causing me to make a wry smile.

.....just how much will I need to grow before I can make that man crawl on the ground?

.....at that time, just how strong will I have become?

My heart pounded the more I thought about it.

While having such enjoyable feelings, my name was called, so I went up to the arena.

From there, a mock battle began.

My body is light.

My thoughts are extremely clear.

My body is moving exactly as I imagined.

It was just like how I fought during that bandit incident.

"The winner is Mel!"

Before I realized it, the referee's voice sounded out.

As it ended a little faster than I thought it would, I felt a little unsatisfied as I sheathed my sword and descended from the arena.

"Yo, Jou-chan."

Kuroitsu-san called out to me as I walked by while wiping my sweat.

“.....today you were quite amazing.”

“Thank you very much. I am happy to hear that from you, Kuroitsu-san.”

I smiled while thanking him.

However, a wrinkle appeared on Kuroitsu-san's brow as he came closer while making a solemn expression.

The difference in our enthusiasm is quite amazing. –thinking that, it felt like I'd unintentionally make a bitter smile.

“Stop it..... looking at your expression, I thought you were okay, but your swordsmanship today has gone cold. No, rather than saying that it's gone cold.....”

As he said that, Kuroitsu-san's facial expression became more and more solemn.

“.....say, Jou-chan. Can I ask you one thing? Though it might be something difficult for Jou-chan to answer.”

“There are things that I can answer, and those that I cannot though.”

“Why did Jou-chan take up the sword?”

“.....I haven't ever taken Kuroitsu-san's sword though?”

“Not that kind of 'take'! Why did you decide to learn the sword?”

I wonder why he was asking about something like that.

Although such a question sprung up within me, it was not an especially hard question to answer.

“.....because my mother was killed.”

That's why I unconcernedly answer with the truth.

Even though I answered simply because I was asked, for some reason, Kuroitsu-san momentarily made a surprised face.

“Did I say something strange?”

“No.....”

For a brief moment, he appeared to be at a loss for words.

“I just wanted to try asking why such a small girl like Jou-chan would take up the sword..... my bad.”

“There is no need for Kuroitsu-san to feel responsible.”

I responded in a light manner.

“Naw, I can’t. Though I’m part of the Army, the fact that we couldn’t protect one of our country’s citizens has been brought before me. So even if Jou-chan says that, I wouldn’t be able to forgive myself..... even though I know that it’s impossible to protect everything by myself, realistically speaking..... sorry for holding you back.”

Right around that time, I heard father’s voice telling everyone to gather. It seems that the mock battles have ended.

“No, it’s fine.”

And so, Kuroitsu-san and I headed towards father.

Chapter 26

Father's Regret

".....excuse me, General. Could I have a moment of your time?"

While I was performing my official duties of the Anderson Marquis House, Kuroitsu said that while coming in.

"You've come at a good time – it's just about calmed down for now. So, what's up? Kuroitsu."

For some reason, Kuroitsu's serious face did not falter.
It was serious to the point where one could feel how much he was brooding.

"I wish to speak about Mel."

"Did Mel do something?"

Hearing my daughter's name, I unconsciously leaned forward and asked.

"Rather than Mel, it is more about General..... is General aware of what Mel is intending on doing?"

"I don't understand the meaning of your question."

"Today, I..... thought that she was scary. Seeing that girl's spar....."

"She is quite the splendid talent, don't you think?"

At my words, Kuroitsu gave a bitter smile.

".....just a little bit before the spar, it felt like the aura that surrounded her changed. She was clad in a thick bloodthirst like one would feel on a battlefield. It's unbelievable for such a small girl to be able to release such a bloodthirst."

Without giving a positive or negative tone..... Kuroitsu apathetically spouted out words.

Instead, seeing his figure trying to prevent his emotions from leaking out, I narrowed my eyes in attempt to decipher his true intentions from his expression.

“In reality, when the spar began, she was wielding her blade with a swordsmanship whose purpose was to kill people without fail. Without thinking about dangers, her entire defence was paper-thin. She entered her opponent’s bosom without any hesitation at all. It was as if she was enjoying the risk that she might lose her life..... no, to begin with, it was a fighting style that seemed to say it was okay even if she lost her life.”

Those words were spoken as if he feared my daughter.

No, in reality..... he probably was afraid.

Because that was something that even I felt occasionally.

Both Kuroitsu and I are people affiliated with the army.

That was precisely why we naturally had experiences in situations where lives are exchanged, so by now we did not think that much of it.

However, even so..... no, because of that we felt fear.

Of that sharp bloodthirst that seemed to conceal a blade within it, and of her fighting style.

It was unfamiliar..... to the point where it felt as if you were looking at someone from another world. That’s how prominent she was in all of that.

“.....that is Mel.”

Quietly, I spoke in a warning manner.

“Rather, ever since coming to the Capital, her sword had lost what made it hers. That is the original her, and her sword.”

“.....why is General teaching her the sword? That is..... in my humble opinion, it is a talent that should never have been awakened. That bloodlust and resolve..... if she takes a single step wrong, it wouldn’t be strange for her to go mad. Could you not have allowed her to proceed on a gentler route?”

“.....it was my ego.”

I murmured softly.

“I had also lost my wife due to bandits. We were birds of a feather. I did not have the qualifications to stop her..... and also, if she could learn the sword, then she would have been able to act as my daughter’s guard and protect her well-being.”

In the Capital, even it is to one of my own subordinates in the Army, the truth that Mel is my daughter is a secret. As such, I spoke while mixing in a lie.

“.....however, her talent was beyond what I had anticipated. I taught her the basic stances, and then had her engage in mock battles with me repeatedly, but..... even without teaching her, she had created that style by herself before I knew it.”

“.....why did that change when she came to the Capital?”

“Probably because she experienced real combat..... though after I stimulated her, she quickly returned to normal.”

“In other words, the reason why her sword returned to its previous state was the General. Even though it was possible for her to go back. For her, who became afraid of the sword, why.....!”

“.....what she was afraid of was not the sword. It was her own talent that she was afraid of.”

“Her own..... talent?”

“Her own talent that allowed her to easily steal people’s lives. Ever since she came to the Capital, she was quite stiff compared to when she was back in my domain. In matches that she’d be able to win if she swung her sword to her hearts content, she unconsciously put a stopper. During this time, prior to training with everyone, I competed with her but..... the fact that she didn’t have much of a stopper during that time is good proof. Having seen the future in which she’d easily be able to steal the lives of her opponents, she repressed herself. In other words, those of the Army that I was training were not adversaries for her. Though saying that to you might be a bit harsh.”

“.....no... way.....”

“.....as you said, she is a step away from madness. Even if she had to throw everything away, even if there is nothing to gain from it, she took up the sword for the sake of revenge. To her, the sword is everything.”

“.....then, wouldn't it be fine if you just let her find another path!?”

At Kuroitsu's shout, I was momentarily left speechless.

“.....even I wished for her to do that.”

“Then.....”

“However, you are looking too lightly at her resolve. No, I also was like that.....”

“.....what do you mean?”

“Rather than stimulating her, I was trying to put an end to her swordsmanship. If I poured relentless words on her heart that was already on the verge of breaking, I thought that that it would easily crumble.”

Don't take the sword, -is what my heart had screamed at that time.

It is fine already, you've done enough..... but.

However, she fought against that.

Rather, at that moment, Mellice vividly displayed to me a spirit that convinced me that if she threw away the sword, her heart would break.

“Her heart is living right on the edge. The sword is everything to it, and does not see anything other than that. Even if she knows that there's nothing to gain in the future, she has chosen to do that. Whether or not her spirit was revived, she would not abandon the sword. That being the case, her bewilderment will on the contrary expose her to danger. If holding back her abilities were to become a habit, then in the future it may become an unforeseen trap for her. That is precisely why she must be allowed to wield the sword in the way that she desires. Looking at the position she is standing in right now, there is but a single method that would allow her to step down from this path.”

“.....incidentally, that method is?”

“Marriage.”

Even if I were to kill the object of her revenge, as long as she was the daughter of the Anderson Marquis House, people aiming at her would appear.

That was something that Duke Armelia had pointed out.

If it was true..... no, as long as the possibility existed, she would have to protect her own well-being.

It would only become unnecessary once she no longer possessed the title of the ‘hero’s daughter’ – the moment she joined her husband’s family.

“Is there really anyone who could take her reins? It’d be impossible if it was some half-hearted guy.”

“You truly are watching her carefully.”

I said that and laughed.

“Honestly speaking, I have no idea. As long as she is able to find someone who she regards above all else, I do not plan on restricting her..... earlier you asked what I wanted to do with her. The answer is: I do not want to do anything. I only wish for her to become happy in her own way. Just that. It is only that, but just that alone is quite a difficult thing to do.”

“.....you speak like a father.”

“I think of myself as her father.”

“.....I understand the General’s feelings well. I deeply apologize for trying to test you.”

“That is fine. In the future, please continue to watch over her.”

At those words, Kuroitsu lowered his head to show his acknowledgement.

Chapter 27

My Outburst of Anger

I motionlessly stared at the view below me.

Ever since the day I lost to Donaldy and cried, for some reason I came to take a liking to the scenery that could be seen from this tower and would often come here after training.

“.....you have quite the thorny atmosphere today as well.”

“Is that so?”

I thought I felt a human presence. So it was Rui?

I had thought that I might be able to meet him again, but to think that we’d meet this quickly.

“That may be because I’ve become honest with myself.”

“Heh.....”

He said that and sat down next to me.

“Say, do you have something that you want to accomplish?”

Suddenly curious, I asked him a question.

“.....what’s with this, so suddenly?”

“It’s because last time I was the only one talking about myself. I wanted to hear about you. You were also insulted for having been born in a blessed environment, right? Even so, you didn’t break..... I thought that it was because you had something that you wanted to accomplish.”

“.....do you feel that it is natural for a tomorrow that is no different from today to come?”

“What’s with that question? Well..... the answer would be no.”

At my answer, Rui momentarily made a surprised expression.

“My mother was killed. I had my family, and a today that was like yesterday. Before her death, I didn’t doubt that a tomorrow that was like today would come. An everyday life is something that you never know when or how it will change.”

“.....I see. My bad.”

“No. It’s not like I was hiding it. So, where were you trying to go with that?”

“.....I’ve been taken with my father to visit the graves of the victims of Towair’s military campaign. It was a tomb with many names lined up on it. The names of citizens, as well as the names of soldiers who fought to protect the citizens were on it.”

“.....I see.”

Before the hero that was my father appeared, we were in a disadvantaged position in the war.

Meaning that a large number of sacrifices appeared amongst the citizens and soldiers.

“I also met with the wounded soldiers who had been dispatched on the campaign..... even though the injured had been injured for the sake of the country, I saw that they were in a situation where they were not properly receiving treatment. Right now, thanks to my father’s orders, the situation is being alleviated bit by bit though..... this country paid many people as sacrifices in order to preserve this everyday life. Even now, somewhere, someone is continuing to pay. Was that in order to protect this country? No, probably nobody is looking on such a grand scale. They probably fought in order to protect the things that they wanted to protect.”

Quietly, Rui pointed outside of the window.

“The guy over there has important people to him, and those people also have important people to them. The ones over there, as well as those over there are the same..... and when a bunch of people gather, a country is formed. It is difficult to listen to the stories of each and everyone of them, but I want to protect a country in which all of them can live peacefully. Without forgetting to respect those who were sacrificed,

I want to succeed their will. That is what I thought.”

“.....in order to protect, huh.....”

I do not understand that feeling.
Rather, it makes me want to vomit.

“Then why didn’t you take up the sword?”

Those words were my true feelings.
There isn’t really a need to protect other people.
Strength is everything.
Just being weak is a sin.
.....and I hate those citizens who use their weakness as a shield.

Using their weakness as a shield, they had father protect them.
However, after having protected them, in the end, father’s..... our most precious person was stolen away, wasn’t she?

Will you not be injured if you’re strong?
Will you not shed tears if you’re strong?
Will you be fine no matter what they do to you if you’re strong?

.....like hell that’s true.
Why do strong people have to save weak people?
Isn’t it fine if the weak people just become stronger?
Then they can just protect themselves.
Why do strong people have to bear the blame from them?

.....I don’t understand.
That’s why I was genuinely surprised when Kuroitsu-san apologized to me.
I did not understand the reason why he was apologizing to me.
I like the people from the Army because they are strong, but as for why they tried to protect others despite having polished their techniques to such an extent..... I could not comprehend it.

“I am not just talking about maintaining public order, but also the arranged environment needed for people to live peacefully. All of that in its entirety. Depending on how you do it, it is possible to protect even the soldiers. That is why I want to follow

in my father's footsteps..... though it is true that I truly do not possess any talent for the sword."

There was no way he could hear the mutterings of my heart as he continued his speech.

".....what about you? Why did you take up the sword?"

"Because my mother was killed. It was so that I could, with my own hands, send the guys who killed my mother straight to hell."

".....revenge, is it?"

"Yes, that's right."

"I see....."

Saying that, he nodded and went silent, continuing to gaze outside.

".....I don't really understand the feeling of wanting to protect."

I also followed his gaze and gazed outside.

"Why can you think like that? After all, that person and that person..... all of them are strangers, are they not? For what reason are you able to work hard for them even though they aren't your important people?"

".....I do not want to see that kind of scene anymore. It's just that. In short, it's just for self-satisfaction."

As he said that, he made a small smile.

".....how about you? What are you going to do after that?"

"After what?"

Unable to understand the meaning behind his question, I parroted it back.

"After your revenge is fulfilled."

"I don't understand your meaning. My goal is to take revenge. It is for that sake along that I polished my sword, and it is for that sake that I am currently living."

The moment I said that, he let out a deep breath.

"That's such a waste."

".....what do you mean?"

With a glare, I scowled at him.

Unable to suppress it, my heart's irritation was easily expressed on my face.

"You are. If revenge is your only goal, then what do you plan on doing after that? The moment you fulfill it, you might get a feeling of achievement. However, if you offer up everything for that alone..... then there isn't anything left for the future, isn't there? Like that, nothing will remain."

"Even if there's only things to lose, even if there's nothing to gain, I don't care about stuff like that. This path was the only thing I could choose. Though you might not understand that, having never lost anything before."

When it started..... I am not sure. However, before I knew it, my vision was dyed red. I watched a scene where everything was monochrome, and when I swung my sword, everything would be dyed red.

Even if in reality, not a single drop of blood had been spilled.

The single colour that painted my vision even made me feel that it was beautiful.

My heart may be broken.

However, even so.

The act of revenge was the only thing supporting my heart.

".....yeah, I don't get it. Because unlike you, I have never had something important to me stolen away."

".....then don't deny my revenge!"

".....I do not have any intention of denying it. Such..... strong emotions to the point where you'd shed tears of chagrin while seeking strength, and shout as you are now

to defend them. That's just how strongly you feel about it, right? I am not you, and having not experienced myself the source of such emotions, I cannot easily deny them. Even if I did deny them, those words would just be meaningless. For someone who only sees the surface to say something to someone like you who holds strong emotions is pointless..... most importantly, it is rude to you."

When saying that, he glanced towards me.

.....his eyes were so clear.

It was as if they were projecting the calmness of his heart.

"However, the future that you are painting has nothing past revenge. Even if I have no talent in the military arts, I understand it. That, for you who has studied with such resolve up until now, it is a waste of your talent. After your revenge is fulfilled, what will you do? At the very least, I felt that it was a waste that you do not look towards the future."

"What I want to use my sword arm for is up to me, isn't it!?"

Rui sighed once more and stood up.

And then, he quickly left.

".....yeah....."

What have I done?

The few words that he spoke before leaving caused the blood that had risen to my head to drain and return to normal. However, I could only speechlessly watch his back as he walked away.

Chapter 28

Older Brother's Wish

".....elder brother."

When I returned to the mansion from the tower, I headed towards brother's room. Somehow, I just felt like talking to elder brother. Elder brother was playing board games by himself. I'm sure that he was reviewing his match with Romel-ojisan on his own.

"I just started my break. No need to hold back."

"Yes....."

".....how unusual for Mel to come here."

"Is that so?"

Tilting my head to the side, I thought back to my past visits. He was indeed right – since coming to the Capital, I've only come to visit him once or twice.

"And so, what is it?"

"Would you give me the privilege of talking with you for a while?"

"Of course. That's why you came here, right?"

"Yes..... um, why did brother want to learn the sword?"

When I asked that, elder brother laughed.

"That's quite an odd question to ask. For the firstborn son of the Anderson Marquis House, which excels in the military arts in Tasmeria Kingdom, is it not necessary to learn a certain degree of martial arts?"

“That is true, but.....”

Clink clink, elder brother stopped moving the board game pieces and met my gaze.

“.....Melly. If you have something that you want to ask, it’s fine to ask directly. Right now, only you and I are here. There is no need for restraint between family, right?”

At brother’s words, I stopped momentarily.

.....now that I think of it, how long has it been since I last spoke to my brother like this?

No, it wasn’t just with elder brother.

It was with father, and Granny too.

I have only been holding the bare minimum amount of conversation, and never spoke to them as family.

Or perhaps, I have only really spoken in conversations related to revenge.

That is why I was bewildered for a second.

However, without pressing me to continue speaking, elder brother simply did nothing but gaze at me.

“.....has brother never desired to take revenge for mother?”

For a moment, a wrinkle appeared on brother’s forehead as he appeared to ponder.

“Honestly speaking, I have. I wanted to send that bunch who killed mother straight to hell with my own hands, without leaving a single one of them behind.”

“.....and now?”

At my question, elder brother made a sad smile.

“Even now, I think that. If I was blessed with the chance, I would act without hesitating. I have no intention of forgiving those who stole my..... *our* family’s precious person and happiness.”

“That’s good.....”

His answer relieved me.

“However, Melly. On the other hand, I am worried about your current condition.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“You said that revenge is everything. In other words..... right now, you are turning your eyes away from the present and only looking at the past. Without desiring happiness..... seeing you just single-mindedly continuing to pursue a past happiness that will never return, how am I supposed to have a peace of mind?”

As if to admonish me, elder brother spoke his question slowly.
However, those words magnificently sent my heart dropping with a *thump*.

.....I made a choice.

I threw away that gentle world of “what if”, and decided to advance on the thorny path of blood.

That is why I wouldn’t look back to the past.

.....however, the me who thought that was the one who was clinging on to that kind past the most, unable to break away from it.

From that past that will no longer return, and those warm days.

But, I cannot be forgiven.

Because, that day..... the reason why mother separated from father and tried to return to the territory earlier was because of my selfishness.

If I hadn’t said that I wanted her to celebrate on the very day of my birthday..... she would have returned together with father, and mother may have arrived safely at the mansion.

.....more than anything, I cannot be forgiven.

Because I was the cause that lead to everyone’s precious person being stolen away.

And I cannot pretend that this violent fury doesn’t exist.

This fury that desires revenge even if it drags me down with it.

“.....you may be satisfied like that. However, father and I are hoping that you will become happy. Because we love you as family. That is exactly why we find your current state heartbreaking, and are worried about you.”

Though I thought that, elder brother's tender eyes seemed to find fault with it. To the current me, that kindness hurt.

"Elder brother....."

"When I heard that you were attacked by bandits, my blood froze. And then, from the bottom of my heart, I felt annoyed with my own idiocy..... within me, mother's incident was of utmost priority. It is not a lie that I wished to throw those guys down to hell."

Saying that, elder brother stretched a hand towards me.

"However..... you are alive. You're alive.....!"

A hand larger than my own grasped my hand tightly. It was as if..... as if it were trying to make sure of my existence.

"I..... do not want to turn my eyes away from the precious things that are currently in my hands, and then regret it later."

Elder brother's words, the tone of which gradually began to be filled with heat, pierced my chest.

I thought that elder brother's facial expressions had become more plentiful lately, like how they were when we were younger.

Father was the same.

Although I thought that it was thanks to Romel-ojisan..... was I wrong?

".....brother, are you saying that I am wrong?"

"No. A person's heart belongs to that person alone. There is no right or wrong. As long as your heart does not deny your wish, then to you, that is right. That is why, what I said was..... my ego."

Elder brother released my hand and stroked my head.

"I will not deny your desire to have revenge. No, I can't..... huh. You should do what you desire to accomplish. However, please do not forget. That we are praying for your happiness."

It was a kind wish.

However, that warm and gentle heart was unable to penetrate this frozen heart of mine, rendering it incapable of melting the ice itself.

Why do they pursue happiness?

.....even though the same happiness from that time will never return.

Why do they pray for me to be happy?

.....even though it's impossible to see the same scene from that time.

No matter how much we pray, it is impossible to take back the happiness that was stolen at that time.

.....I don't understand.

Questions welled up and spun around before disappearing.

That night, for the first time in a while I was engrossed in thinking, making me unable to fall asleep immediately.

I thought the entire time, as the night wind blew in from the window that I had left wide open.

Chapter 29

Tears

And then, I greeted the next day without sleeping.

In the end, without settling my thoughts, I was swinging my sword as usual in the training arena.

No matter how much I thought about it, I did not understand.

Rui's heart that said it was a waste of my talent.

Elder brother's heart that said he would pray for my happiness.

My talent was something that I polished in order to tear the target of my revenge into pieces.

My happiness was fulfilling my revenge.

No matter how many times I thought about it, I had nothing else but that.

Our family lost mother, and I thought that for everyone, a single part of their heart froze over.

However, it wasn't like that.

It was my heart that had frozen over.

No..... the notion that it had frozen over still might be a bit too lukewarm to describe it.

If a heart had a physical form, I'm sure that mine would be broken, beat up, with a distorted shape.

Because even now, my field of sight was dyed bright red.

Realizing that I was thinking such needless thoughts while swinging my sword, I redirected my thoughts.

Let's stop thinking about difficult things.

Because right now at this time, I should only focus on polishing my sword.

Ahh, my heart is dancing. How fun.

It's so fun that I can't help it.

Within the red that was reflected in my eyes, I could feel a faint delight.
When training ended, I looked around at the surroundings.
Today there were fewer people than usual.

Kuroitsu-san was also not here today.
.....I wonder if something happened?
Such a question rose in my mind.
However, as long Kuroitsu-san wasn't here, I had nobody I could ask.

Rather, even if something had happened, they probably wouldn't tell a common citizen like me.
With a feeling similar to resignation, I cleaned up and returned to the mansion.
When I entered the mansion, elder brother came running towards me in an unusually noisy manner.

"Melly.....!"

"Is something the matter?"

"Just now, a notice came....."

From elder brother's appearance, it was clear that it was not about some trivial matter, so I prepared myself.

".....father has subjugated the bandits that attacked mother....."

At that moment, my vision went completely black.
It even felt like the world went completely silent and stopped for a moment.

".....is that true?"

"Yeah, there's no mistake. Those from the Army investigated it."

".....is that... so....."

I returned brother's words and walked forward with a shaky, unsteady gait.

"O-oi.....! Melly!"

As if to stop me, elder brother called out my name.

“.....I will return to my room.”

However, I spoke to reject him and returned to my room.

.....honestly speaking, how I managed to return to my room after that..... I have no clue.

Although I did not know how, before I knew it, I was in my own room.

I absentmindedly looked at the outside scenery from my window.

Unnoticed, the sun had set and the sky was concealed by a veil of darkness.

It was quiet.

So much so that it gave the illusion that I was the only one in this world.

A drop of water slid along my face.

.....are these tears of happiness? Or.....

At the very least, it was no mistake that my goal had been achieved.

Because father was the one who subjugated the bandits that attacked mother.

If they were the ones who stole mother away, I'm sure that father was merciless.

He probably knocked them down to hell magnificently.

That is why, my wish for revenge has been fulfilled.

.....I was honestly happy about that. I am happy but..... but, I cannot be sincerely happy.

Rather, it feels as if a hole has been opened up in my heart.

.....I wanted to settle things by myself.

I know that that was just my own selfishness.

However, with these hands, using the techniques I had polished, I wanted to use everything I had cultivated up until now to settle things.

Because it was for that sake that I took up the sword..... it was for that sake that I polished my swordsmanship.

And it was for that alone that I have been living.

It was vexing.
And, it was wretched.

My objective was reached.
.....then, what should I be doing?
Carrying this sense of loss, I could not find a purpose or meaning to living.

From now on, how should I live?
My heart was dyed the same colour as the sky.
That day, I cried the entire time.
Like I did the day I lost my mother.

Chapter 30

Sending Mother Off

Clank clank, the sound of swords clashing resonated.
The scenery of the usual training.

I was watching that from above.
Since that day..... since elder brother notified me about father's subjugation of the bandits, I have not gone to training.
I have remained secluded inside my room the whole time.

I haven't met with either father or elder brother.
.....just how many days have I been like this, I wonder?
As the hole in my heart remained gapingly wide open, I simply felt myself overcome with a sense of loss.

The darkness that I saw that night even now continued to envelop my heart.
Like this, I just wanted to stay here without doing anything..... and then like this, I want to rot away.
It was to the point where I thought that.

I flopped my body onto the bed and laid down.
.....was a day this long before?
Morning came, and then night comes. And then, morning comes once more.
No matter what happens, time will continue to carve its tracks on the world as if nothing had occurred.

Even if I continue to lock myself up in my room like this, or don't..... nothing will change.
Continuing to think deeply about things like that, I closed my eyelids so that the outside scenery was no longer reflected in my eyes.

Staying like that, I fell asleep without realizing it, and a large part of the day passed.
I sluggishly raised my heavy body.
And then, I approached the window.

.....it seems that training had ended.

At this rate, I wonder what I will do if I continue to stay here alone?

.....what is it that I want to do?

I placed my hand on the window.

In a daze, I stared at the outside scenery.

.....I want to see the scenery that I saw at that time one more time.

Suddenly, I thought that.

And then the moment I thought that, I impulsively headed outside.

Leaving the mansion, I ran towards the tower.

When I reached my goal, I ran up the stairs.

“.....Rui.....”

Standing alone, I called his name.

However, his figure was nowhere to be found.

Naturally, my shoulders dropped.

Just what I wanted to do by meeting him..... even I didn't know.

I sat down at that place.

Here, this place was my designated spot.

I quietly gazed at the scenery below me.

Unlike the other day, the haze of darkness was covered by the light of the town.

The many lights united, creating a magical scenery.

.....it's pretty.

It was unlike the usual scenery, but it fascinated me even more than it normally did.

Suddenly, the sound of something rustling entered my ears.

When I felt around with my hand, there was the sensation of a paper caught in between the stone floor and a rock.

I pulled that out.

If it's here..... then is it something that belongs to someone affiliated to the army?

But, nobody would climb the long staircase to come all the way here.

.....could it be?

Thinking that, I unfolded the paper.

[If your goal disappears, it is fine to just find another one. You have that much time. Don't live in a hurry.]

There were just 3 sentences.

If I hadn't found it with this timing, I probably wouldn't have understood what it was saying.

But the current me understood it to the point that it hurt.

My tears overflowed and dripped onto the letter.

.....to me, revenge was everything.

I threw away everything other than that, and only looked at that alone.

Despite that, I suddenly lost it.

It is true that my revenge had been fulfilled..... but it was in a completely way from how I desired it.

Even though I had only been looking at it while advancing forward, my destination was suddenly stolen away from the side and vanished.

The moment I became aware of that, it felt as if even my footing had crumbled.

Just where should I go from here on out?

Just what do I want to do from here on out?

Because I hadn't been looking at anything other than revenge, I didn't know anything at all.

Having lost my guidepost, it felt as if I had been thrown out into the darkness.

I felt a vague fear of the future.

And with it, impatience and emptiness.

For the first time, I understood the meaning of the "after that" that Rui spoke of, to the point that it hurt.

".....it is fine to find another one, huh."

Leaking out a few words, I laugh.

[However..... you are alive. You're alive.....!]

I recalled elder brother's words within me.

.....that's right, I'm alive.

I still have a future. Unlike mother.

Just how much regret did mother feel?

.....to me, it was unfathomable.

I hated myself for being the cause of mother's death, resented the ones who actually stole her away, and was indignant at the world that allowed it to happen.

Then, I pitied myself and my family, who had lost mother.

However, the one who felt the most regret, the one who was saddest, was most certainly mother.

If it was me, I would cry.

Because mother had everything taken away from her.

What she wanted to do, the times she dreamed of, and the time she could have spent with her family.

After all this time, I finally arrived at such a thought.

Because I had not thought about that before, my own time had been stopped.

That was why.

I mustn't waste it. I mustn't abandon it.

.....the future.

For one who possesses a future to abandon it, in spite of knowing of those who do not, is arrogance.

At the same time, it is an insult.

I should not be afraid of the fact that I cannot envision the future, but should be thankful for the fact that I have one.

If I cannot see a goal, then it is fine to find one again.

Even if there is no goal, what I have cultivated up until now will not disappear.

The instant I thought that, I felt my mood become lighter.

Even though I haven't decided on anything.

However, it is fine to slowly decide.

It is fine to continue forward like that.

“.....mother. It seems like I will truly be able to see mother off.”

Facing the sky, I murmured thus.

Chapter 31

His Feelings

“.....oh, Rui. You’ve come at a good time. I’ll be adding these documents and these ones too. Both of them will be due three days from now.”

Seeing the mountain of documents that was placed before me as my father spoke carelessly, I felt killing intent well up momentarily. I suppressed that killing intent and nodded.

After all, the reason why father was transferring the documents to me was so that I could learn more through practical experience.

.....it’s just that from my point of view, knowing that father could finish all of these in a single day if he put his mind to it made me feel quite downhearted.

“I understand, yes, that I do. In exchange, don’t head into town today and please obediently stay at home. Since last time you gave me documents, there were several that I had to confirm with you, but couldn’t.”

“Ahh..... fine, fine.”

Father nodded in resignation.

“For now, I shall take care of these.”

I left the room holding a similar amount of documents as what I had brought in..... in fact, the amount might have even been a little more than that.

Feeling the weight that pressed down heavily on my arms, I involuntarily let out a sigh.

Going out into the corridor, I walked towards my room.

Suddenly, the view of the tower from the window entered my line of sight.

It reminded me of the young girl called Melly that I met there.

.....I had received notice of the bandit subjugation while I was helping out my father.

I thought that it would be great if they were the same bandits that were the subjects of her revenge.

.....however, at the same time, another question sprouted from that thought. Just how would she feel about that..... I wondered.

She had said..... even if there were only things to lose, and nothing to gain from it, revenge was the only thing she could choose.

.....that being the case, what about after she finishes taking revenge?
The moment I heard her say that, *that* was the very first thing I thought.

Pouring her everything into achieving a single goal, while throwing away everything else..... what would happen if her goal were to disappear despite doing all of that?

The more she put into it, the greater the sense of loss would be once she were to lose that goal.

When I thought that, I became worried for that girl.
About that girl who was dangerously single-minded, continuing forward in a straight dash towards her goal.

If, the reason why she shed tears in frustration at having lost to another, and the reason why she was able to smile at being able to advance forward on her path, was purely for the sake of the goal called revenge, then—

Then, the moment that revenge disappears, what would she cry for, and what would she smile for?

I wonder if that sense of loss will torment her?
It wouldn't cause her to break, will it?
I became worried about that.

I turned my gaze back to the documents once more.
Though I am worried about her, I will not be able to go to the tower in the near future.
Because I also have my own goal that I am dashing towards.

Even so, ever since the notice came, I made time on several occasions to visit the tower, but was unable to meet her in the end.
.....that is why I at least left a letter there.

Since it was the first time I wrote a letter for something outside of a formal setting, I was considerably perplexed over what to write, but it was a good memory.

It was just three lines.

Just how much did I hesitate over writing just those three lines?

The next time we meet, I think it would be good if she could at least get mad at me. As long as she doesn't become crushed under the sense of loss, close her heart, and lose her emotions, then it is fine.

Rather than that, I feel that it would be much more preferable if she became unreasonably angry, while grieving at the fact that her goal was snatched away.

I wonder, just when was it that I began to feel that her lively face was endearing? Just when was it that I started to feel that I wanted to look at it forever?

Rather than an aristocratic child that barely shows any emotion on their face, only making a soft smile; I felt that she who cried, laughed, and became angry..... I saw that she, whose emotions changed so honestly, was exceedingly vibrant.

".....excuse me, Rui-sama. Romel-sams is calling for you."

A single servant called out to me, whose feet had come to a stop.

"Father is-?..... understood. Sorry, but leave these documents in my room for me."

"Certainly."

.....in any case, let's hurry up and clear up the work in front of me.

Refreshing my feelings, I headed towards father's room.

Chapter 32

My World

I swing my sword.

.....feeling slightly out of place, I furrow my eyebrows while fighting.

As I thought, my sword was repelled and I lost.

“Did something happen? You suddenly disappeared recently too.”

My sparring opponent, Kuroitsu-san, questioned me in a mystified manner.

“I felt some hesitation in your sword.”

“Indeed. It probably means that I haven’t finished putting my emotions into order.”

Kuroitsu-san did not appear to be very convinced by my words, but didn’t question me further.

In the end, I returned to training.

Because, that’s all I have.

Ever since then, I cried a lot.

I cried a lot, and thought.

But as expected, the current me wasn’t capable of coming up with a goal or a meaning to life.

I haven’t been looking at anything else after all.

Without turning my eyes towards anything other than revenge, I simply chased after that single goal.

That is why the current me doesn’t have anything to use to make a judgment on.

Which choice should I take..... to begin with, I don’t even know what kind of choices I have.

Without anything to base my judgment on, I don’t know anything.

But I cannot remain standing still.
I cannot keep absentmindedly waiting for time to pass.

I must abstain from merely letting time go by for mother's sake as well.
That is why I returned.
Although it may not bring me anything, this is all I have.
Other than this, I don't have anything, but I do not want to stand still.
That being the case, rather than having weird thoughts and wavering, I felt that it was better to return to training like this even if nothing changes.

It seems that for me, rather than thinking with my head, I was a type better suited for moving my body.
Though I haven't finished putting my emotions into order, ever since returning to training and swinging my sword, I feel like I have started to calm down bit by bit.

Instead of saying something, Kuroitsu-san ruffled my hair.

"Ahh..... the guys that are here today are gonna head out to eat after this. How about you come along too, Ojou-chan?"

My head froze momentarily at the sudden invite.
But after thinking for a bit, I nodded.

"By all means."

"I see. Then, I'll go ask the General."

"Thank you very much."

I want to see various things.
I want to try various things.

That is what I thought.
Though I still cannot see my goal... no, precisely because I cannot see it.
I wanted to change myself, who up until now, has not been turning my gaze towards anything but the sword.

That is why this is a good opportunity.
Thus, after training, I went to town.

When I thought about it, this is the first time I went to the stores in town.
There was no need for me to buy things myself after all, and I was training all day long too.
In a sense, I am also like a noble, being a sheltered daughter.

As I looked around restlessly inside of the store, I followed after Kuroitsu-san.

“Kuroitsu-saaaaan!”

Members of the Army sitting at seats in one corner of the store called out to Kuroitsu-san.

“Oh, I’ve made you wait!”

Kuroitsu-san also responded while smiling.

“Seriously. Just why…… wait, uwahh! Kuroitsu-san, have you kidnapped Mel-chan?”

“Don’t be stupid. There’s no way I’d be capable of kidnapping Ojou-chan, right? I’d have the tables turned on me.”

“ “ “That’s true.” ” ” ”

Everyone who had been listening in curiously on the conversation all nodded at the same time.

It appears that they all were amongst those participating in the training at the Anderson Marquis House, as I could recognize all of them.

“Naw, I just didn’t think that she would come here. Nice to see you, Mel-chan. We welcome you.”

“Thank you.”

Suddenly, the surroundings became noisy.

“It’s good that you came.”

“I’m happy that you came.”

“Kuroitsu-san, good going! You’ve brightened up this musty place filled with men.

Surprised at the various words of welcome, I hesitantly looked around at the surroundings, causing Kuroitsu-san to turn his gaze towards me.

“What’s wrong?”

“Um, after coming so abruptly, I was wondering why I was so welcomed.....”

“It’s only natural! We’ve all been shedding sweat together in the same place, diligently training together all this time. Ojou-chan is our comrade.”

“That’s right! I admire Mel-chan. Cause you’re *that* strong even though you’re so young. When I was Mel-chan’s age, all I did was play~”

“Even though at first we thought – just what could the General’s prized kid possibly amount to! – didn’t we~?”

“That jealousy was blown away a long time ago. I was astonished when I learned about the amount of independent practice Mel-chan does.”

“Ahh, I get that. That’d definitely be impossible for me.”

I became dumbfounded at the words that came out of everyone’s mouths.

“.....everyone has a high opinion of Ojou-chan. It’s just that they never had the chance to say it. It can’t be helped, since they felt a sort of wall around Ojou-chan, telling them not to approach you.”

“.....is that so?”

“That’s right. You shouldn’t just focus on the sword, but look around yourself a little.”

At the straightforward words that hit the truth of the matter, I briefly became speechless.

It is true that up until now, I was like that..... is what I realized.

When I thought that, Kuroitsu-san pat my head.

Putting this realization together with everyone's words from earlier, I felt slightly apologetic, yet ticklish, and turned my gaze to the ground.

"Kuroitsu-san. What are you talking about together with Mel-chan~? Come talk together with everyone."

"Sure. Come on, you come too, Ojou-chan."

".....yes!"

After that, we took our seats and everyone ordered drinks and food as they pleased. While feeling a bit excited at eating food from somewhere other than home for the first time, I listened to everyone's conversation.

".....why did everyone become soldiers?"

Around the time that the atmosphere had warmed up, I mouthed a question that I had been thinking about.

"Why we became soldiers, you ask..... well, for money. Since I have a lot of siblings."

Failing to understand what having a lot of siblings had to do with the reason why, my head tilted unconsciously.

"Ahh, well. In other words, it was in order to reduce food expenses. For someone like me without any education, the easiest and best way to rise up was in the Army, which has a merit system. Well, the fact that I also had a bit of confidence in my skill also played a role though."

The words 'in order to reduce food expenses' gave me a considerable amount of shock.

.....after all, I didn't know about something like that.

Because I thought that it was natural for a warm meal to appear as long as you desired it.

Was that not a natural thing?

"Though that self-confidence was crushed by the General early on."

While my thoughts were spinning round and round in my head, the other people began to tease him.

Everyone didn't show a surprised expression like me.

Rather, it was as if what he had said was common sense.

"Shaddup. Then what about you guys, why'd you become one?"

"Me? Because it's cool! When I saw the General's triumphant return to the country, I felt that I definitely had to become a soldier in the future."

"Ahh, I get that. I unconsciously thought that as long as that person is here, we, and this country will be fine. I was also like that."

"That's true. The General's existence is big..... during the war, the General saved my village. That's why I wanted to follow that person, and decided that I also wanted to become someone who could protect others."

"I'm not like you guys with some circumstances giving you a motive and resolve. It's just that I somehow felt like it~. I understand those feelings. When I entered the Army, I was lucky and got assigned to the General's unit, but what that person carries on his back is immense, and made me feel that I wanted to chase after him wherever he goes. Before I knew it, I started to feel that continuing to chase after that person's back was something to be proud of."

Unnoticed, the topic changed to discussions like the contents of father's training, and father's martial stories.

Though they had grim appearances, their eyes sparkled like those of children when they spoke about father.

Saying that they were proud to continue chasing after father's back.

That they want to be like father, becoming a protector of someone.

They spoke with an extremely hot passion.

".....why does everyone..... feel that they want to protect others?"

Suddenly, I raised a question to Kuroitsu-san sitting next to me.

"Protect, is it? In the beginning, the ones who held such great intentions were probably only those like that guy who were affected by the war. Money, honour..... everyone

here had their own reasons why they knocked on the Army's door. To protect is a noble intention, but it's not like they had that intention from the start. However, before we realized it, to us, being able to work under the General became our greatest pride. Everyone's been charmed. By the General. When we think about how we want to be like that General, our bodies move naturally. And that is connected with protecting another, becoming yet another thing that we are proud of..... going round and round, we believe that it would be good as long as we can protect the country and our important people."

"Going round and round, you say....."

"Well, one day Ojou-chan will probably understand it."

Kuroitsu-san was called out by another person, so the conversation was cut off, but the hazy feeling that I felt in my heart at that moment continued to smolder deep within my chest.

Chapter 33

Father's Tears

.....that feeling remained even after I returned home.
Because, I just don't understand.
That feeling of wanting to protect another.

When was it, that Rui also said those words?
Why was it that even though they stole mother away..... father continued to work in a station where he protected the people?
While being riddled with wounds, why did they still continue on that path?

"Welcome home, Mel."

".....say, Granny. Has father returned home yet?"

I stealthily whispered by her ear.

"Yes. He has already returned."

"Would it be alright for me to visit him?"

".....according to the steward, he should not have any more arrangements for today."

"I see. Then I will go see him for a bit."

I trotted over to father's study.
Now that I think of it, it might have been a while since I last had a face to face conversation with father.

At the very least, right after father subjugated the bandits, I holed myself up, and after that father's side had become noisy.

When I entered father's room a little nervously, father was leisurely taking a sip of alcohol.

“Melly, is it? It’s quite unusual for you to come to my room..... now that I think of it, it seems that today you went out to play with Kuroitsu and everyone?”

“Yes, it was very fun.”

“That is good..... so, what’s wrong?”

“There isn’t anything wrong, but there was something that I wanted to ask father.”

“Hou..... what is it? Try asking.”

“.....how can father want to protect the people?”

At my sudden question, father made a slightly surprised expression.

“.....today when I was talking with Kuroitsu-san and everyone, I asked them why they became soldiers. I came to know of their various reasons. But apart from their respective reasons, unnoticed, they came to admire father and like father, wanted to protect the country..... and the citizens as well..... but I could not fundamentally understand what they said. Just why does father try to protect the people?”

“.....is there something strange about me trying to protect the people?”

“Yes. Because, father..... wasn’t mother killed by the very people that father was protecting?”

I could tell that father gasped at my words.

“Is it that important to protect people whose names and faces you don’t even know?..... even though you don’t know when or if they’ll return the favour with enmity.”

“.....are the people enemies to you?”

“No. But, it is true that I do not think very well of them. If all they can do is be protected all the time, then they should become stronger themselves. Become stronger, and then they can just protect the things that they want to protect themselves! Isn’t that fine!? Where is there a need for father to protect everyone? To me, compared to the soldiers

of Towair, the people of this country are more.....”

Pachin, a crisp sound reverberated.

When I felt my cheek become hot, I realized that I was hit by father.

“.....don’t say any more than that. You mustn’t say any more than that.”

At father’s low voice, I swallowed back the words that had been about to come out.

“Even I didn’t originally have such noble intentions like wanting to protect the people or the country. It was simply for the sake of trying out my own skills.”

Exhaling, father let out a heavy sigh.

“I lost myself in it. During the war, upon seeing the citizens without the means to protect themselves being one-sidedly trampled, I felt that I who had the means to fight had to protect them, and my body naturally moved to do so.”

Father gulped down the contents of the glass he was holding.

Drinking the contents all in one breath, father once again let out another sigh.

“After Melilda was killed, I was made to think about various things. When I think that the ones who killed my wife were the people of this country, I wonder why I tried to fight so hard at that time and find it all pointless..... however. The ones who taught me that what I did wasn’t useless, were none other than the people themselves.”

As father said that, he smiled in a visibly sad manner.

“After they propped me up as a hero or whatnot, well..... I had to fulfill the responsibilities attached to that name, and continued to run forward recklessly. But before I knew it, a path was made behind me. And on that path, there were people who began slowly, but surely, following after me. They were none other than the people. You heard right? That the ones whose villages were burned down in the war became soldiers. They saw my exploits at that time and became people who wanted to be able to protect someone else as well. The people following after me will protect the precious people of someone whose face they do not know, and that someone else will follow after those who are following me. And like that, I once again was able to feel pride in continuing my path, and was saved. What I’ve done so far wasn’t pointless. It goes round and round, and eventually, perhaps there will no longer be any people who

will have to face the sadness of losing a precious person like myself.”

“.....but-!”

“Are all of the citizens bandits? Will they become bandits? Do you not understand that the citizens also have precious people themselves? Being unable to protect those people by themselves, is it a sin for them to want you to protect those people and rely on you?”

“.....-tch!”

“Not everyone has a talent for martial arts like you. And even if they had it, they do not have the free time to spend every single day polishing it. Would you tell those people to protect themselves using their own power, and then, for that purpose, tell them to undergo the same training as yourself while forsaking them? That is what you would call arrogance.”

“But, I.....”

Even I could tell that I was gradually becoming unable to mouth words of rebuttal.

“For example..... that’s right. If your Granny were to ask you for help, would you not assist her?”

“.....Granny is my precious person. Of course I’d help her.”

“Then if Granny’s precious person were to ask for your help?”

“.....since it would make Granny sad if they disappeared, I’d protect them.”

“You wouldn’t refuse them and tell them to protect themselves? Even though they are someone whose face nor name you don’t know, you would still protect them?”

I could not speak any further.

Because I understood what father was trying to say.

“It is like that. Going round and round, that is what it means to protect someone’s precious person..... not all of the people are bad. The ones who killed your mother were, in the end, bandits. The sin lies with those people alone, and the blame lies with

me for being unable to protect her. It is wrong to charge all of the citizens with that sin.”

Father gently wrapped my face with those large hands of his.

There wasn't any heat nor pain anymore.

Instead, my eyes felt hot, and tears were overflowing.

“Strangers have people who think of them as precious. I do not want to see the forms of people like me grieving at the loss of their precious people..... that is precisely why, I can only continue to go forward. That is what I feel.”

Father wiped my tears and said that while smiling.

I contemplated father's words inside of my heart countless times.

[I do not want to see the forms of people like me grieving at the loss of their precious people]

.....just those words, those feelings..... I could also understand.

The despair at that time, the sadness at that time..... the hatred at that time.

I also do not want to experience that ever again.

At the same time, I do not want the people precious to me to experience that either.

Because I myself understood that pain..... that was precisely why.

The moment I thought that, I suddenly recalled the words that Rui once told me.

[.....in order to maintain this daily life, this country has sacrificed a lot of people. Even now, someone somewhere is continuing to pay that sacrifice. Is that to protect this country? No, no one is looking at things on such a large scale. Each of them is probably fighting to protect the things that they want to protect.]

He said that at that tower.

.....if that was true.

Then there were probably other people who were like me at that time, despairing at the irrationality of this world, being tortured by a sense of loss.

The moment I realized that, I felt ashamed at myself.

Chapter 34

My Oath

Up until now, I have..... been conceited in thinking that I was the most unfortunate person in this world.

Having my precious person stolen away was indeed enough of a motivator to curse the world for my misfortune.

But that there were people other than me also in the same situation..... such a thought never occurred to me.

Even though they were close to me.

Even though it was older brother and father..... that were the people who had lost their precious person.

Despite that, I..... did not think about their feelings at all.

I simply cursed this world's irrationality, felt ashamed at my own helplessness, and then spited my own existence that became the spark which lead to mother's death.

I turned my eyes towards revenge alone, while at the same time only focussing on my own attachments.

[I..... do not want to turn my eyes away from the precious things that are currently in my hands, and then regret it later.]

Even though older brother, who also experienced the same suffering, made such a kind wish for my sake.

The next day, I headed to the tower after training ended.

The scenery at twilight seemed somewhat desolate, yet warm.

[The guy over there has important people to him, and those people also have important people to them. The ones over there, as well as those over there are the same..... and when a bunch of people gather, a country is formed. It is difficult to listen to the stories of each and every one of them, but I want to protect a country in which all of them can live peacefully. Without forgetting to respect those who were sacrificed,

I want to succeed their will. That is what I thought.]

As expected, what it reminded me of were Rui's words.

A lot of people come and go from the town.

Not knowing their names, to me they were just part of the rabble.

Even when I come here, I don't at all have that feeling of wanting to protect them.

.....however.

I do think that it would be better if they didn't have to experience that despair.

And that I don't want them to experience that pain.

.....precisely because I understood how that felt.

The important people of the people below my eyes, whose faces I do not know.

Those important people also have other people important to them.

Relatives, friends, lovers..... any sort of relation is fine.

They also have important people, whose loss would leave a gaping hole in their heart.

It is possible that if I dug deeper, I would find that they were connected to people that I knew.

.....yeah, I'm sure, that we would be connected somehow.

No matter how large this town..... this world is, the connections between people are as complex and intertwined as a spider's web.

That is to say, that even if it is someone whose face you don't know, it is possible that they are the precious person of someone involved with me.

What came to mind was father and older brother, the servants that work at the Anderson Marquis House and the members of the Guard Corps, as well as the people of the Army and..... and Rui as well.

Would I be able to allow them to experience the same suffering that I did at *that* time?

Would I be able to endure seeing their smiles dim?

.....I questioned my own heart.

The answer was no.

I want them be happy.

To live and live..... and if possible, laugh.

I feel that I'd like for them to be like that.

If I must wield my sword for that purpose..... then would that not be a very meaningful

thing?

To protect is such a lofty sentiment..... it is something that I cannot understand.

But, I can..... for my sake.

So that someone..... the people around me do not have to experience the same pain that I did.

I will wield the swordsmanship that I have sharpened.

That is what I decided in my heart.

Chapter 35

The Little Girl's Vow

“Haa haa.....”

For the first time in my life, I ran with all my might.
Desperately, in order to run away.

It was an unthinkable conduct for the usual me.
Exposing this appearance covered in sweat with such disorderly hair.

However, right now I don't care about that.
In any case, I have to run.

But, I'll soon hit my limit.
My breathing was faint, and my feet were staggering.
As a result, though I was about to reach the main street, I tripped on a pebble on the
wayside and collapsed.

I despaired at the approaching footsteps I could hear coming from behind me.

“How bothersome, Jou-chan. Could you not cause us so much trouble?”

“Right, right. Ojou-chan, be a good girl and wait with us until your father comes to pick
you up~”

“It's like that. Whether or not you can stay safe until daddy comes to pick you up
depends on yourself after all.”

I continued to draw back in order to escape from the vulgarly smiling men that
approached.
Perhaps he didn't appreciate my actions, as one of the men appeared irritated, clicking
his tongue.

“.....I'll ask just in case, but do all of you Oji-sans plan on properly escorting this child

back to her father?"

Suddenly, I heard the voice of a newly arrived third party.

Even though it was an unreliable voice that contained a hint of childishness, the fact that it didn't belong to one of the men made me relieved as I raised my head.

"Hm? Are you alright?"

The figure of the person I looked up at was small.

They were about the same age as me.

Based on their hair and appearance, I thought that it was a boy.

That person didn't show any signs of fear and looked at me with a smile.

"Are those people your acquaintances?"

I shook my head several times at their following question.

"I see, I see....."

That person nodded, appearing to have understood something.

How easygoing..... -it instinctively made me want to let out a sigh.

"Who the hell are you?"

"We don't have any business with you. If ya don't wanna get hurt, then hurry up and go somewhere else."

"If it's with this child, then I'll go elsewhere. Otherwise, I won't leave..... so what do you want to do? Oji-sans."

Not paying any heed to the scowling men, that person spoke aloofly.

"It seems like you won't get it until you feel some pain!"

The men held their respective weapons and attacked that person.

I closed my eyes for a single moment at such a dreadful scene.

.....even if he is a boy, there's no way a child my age could win.

There's such a difference in physique..... the way things were, the boy would definitely

end up receiving a good beating, or so I thought.

When I timidly opened my eyes, the scene that appeared before me was the complete opposite of my thoughts.

The large men had become covered in wounds, and were rolling around on the ground!

I could only gaze at that spectacle in mute amazement.

This isn't a dream, is it? – thinking that, I instinctively pinched my cheek.

.....I pinched it harder than expected and it hurt.

“Are you alright?”

The young boy approached me.

Although he was the one who produced such a scene, I didn't feel any fear.

Rather, a sense of relief and joy enveloped me instead.

“.....y-yes. I'm alright.....”

“I see..... that's great. That was quite the disaster. You've become this injured.....”

The boy gently brushed my face.

I couldn't possibly say that because I pinched myself, it began to swell..... embarrassment and the boy's kind hand drew me in, spellbound, as my eyes narrowed.

“Thank you very much for saving me.”

“There's no need for thanks. A cute girl like yourself shouldn't go through this path. Come, I'll take you to the main street, so let's go together.”

Charmed by his hand, I stood up and began to walk.

Curious about what happened to the men while feeling a bit worried that we would be attacked from behind, I glanced briefly behind us.

“It's alright. I tied them up so that they won't be able to get up by themselves.”

The young boy seemed to see through my thoughts as he gave a wry smile while speaking.

“I-Is that so.....”

“Yup. I plan on handing them over to the Army later.”

“Understood. Honestly, it is thanks to you that I was saved. Thank you very much.”

At my thanks, this time the boy made a true smile, without a hint of impurity.

How shocking.....

After being beautifully struck by that smile, I ended up going silent for the rest of our journey together.

When we exited onto the main street and walked for a bit, a group releasing a different kind of presence from within the crowd approached from the opposite direction.

.....it was soldiers from the Army.

Not only that, but they were soldiers under the direct control of the General.

They possessed an ability that did not shame the General’s name, being at the top of the true strength faction. Perhaps because they went through such intense training, they acted in a dignified fashion.

“.....ah, shoot.....”

Upon seeing them, the young boy who had been silent like me up until now, muttered. He was clearly flustered.

Why would he, who boldly challenged the big men, act in such a way..... -although such a question rose in my mind, I soon came to know the answer to it.

The man that appeared to be leading the Army’s soldiers, clearly made a surprised face when he saw the young boy..... and came charging.

“.....you idiooooooooooot!!”

.....while shouting angrily.

As I wondered what was happening, the man turned to the young boy and swung a fist down.

“I thought I didn’t see you around – just what are you doing in a place like this?! No, wait..... I generally get what happened. Geez..... don’t go poking that nose of yours into other’s affairs, just don’t!”

“It’s not like I went out with the intention of poking my nose around. It’s just that when I was walking around town, I learned about this case, and when I walked around a bit, I found her.”

“.....haaaaaaah..... fine. Hurry up and go back.”

“Goooot it..... sorry, it’s like that so I’ll be going.”

The young boy waved his hand lightly and quickly departed.

“.....ah.....”

Just when I was about to call him to a stop..... I realized that I didn’t know his name, and was thus unable to do so.

“I deeply apologize for being late. My name is Gazelle. I have come to pick you up.”

The entrance of a hero normally would draw applause.

However, right now, rather than the country’s hero, the one who was a hero to me was more important.

.....after that, on the way back, I asked the General countless times for the young boy’s name, but..... the General continued to respond with vague words and absolutely would not tell me.

.....I will definitely meet him again.

At that time, I will thank him, and..... -making such a decision, I vowed thus in my heart.



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